

CHRISTMAS

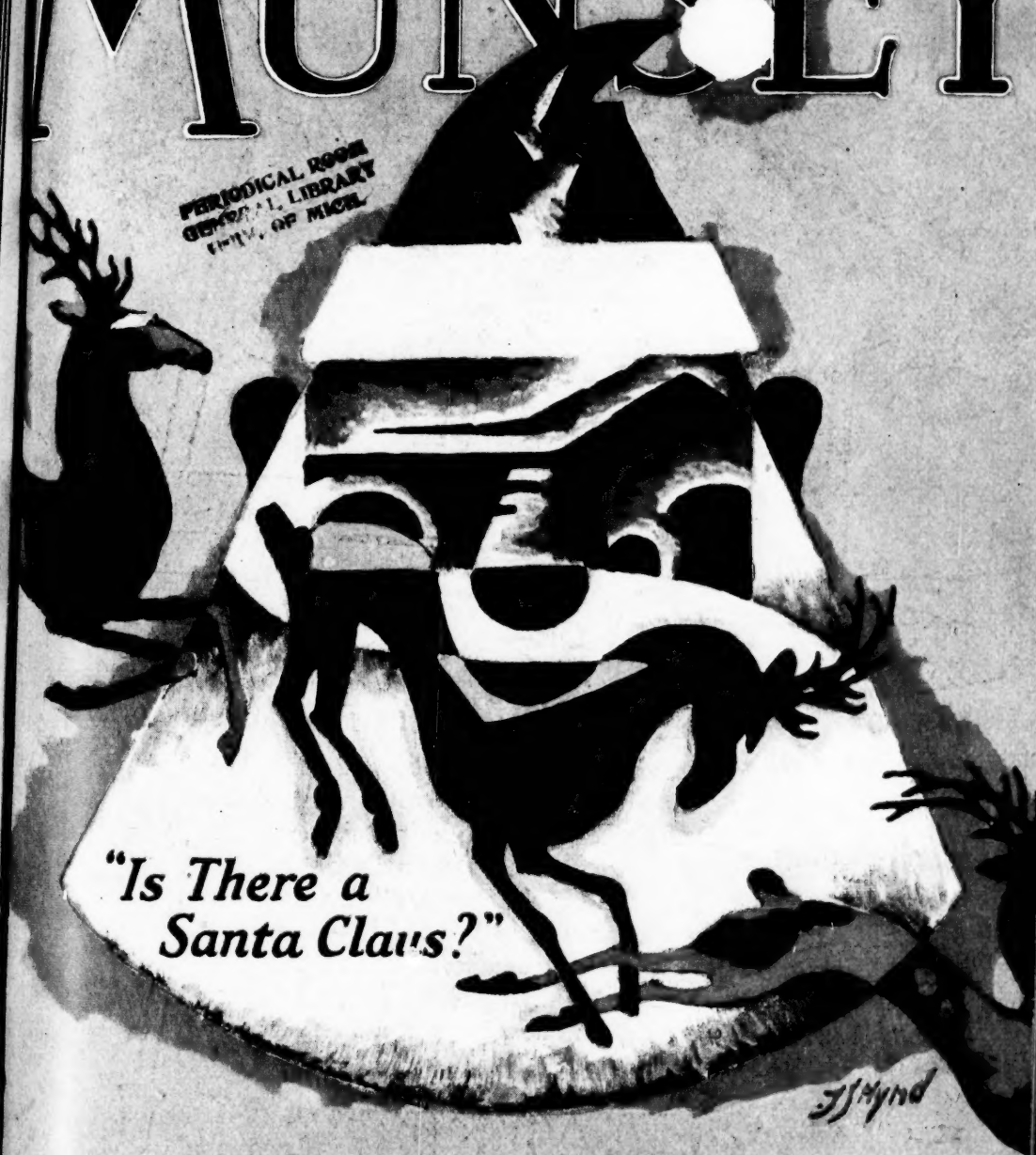
Romance • Adventure

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"Is There a  
Santa Claus?"

## Tiger Love

by Robert Terry Shannon



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# SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

By Fred A. Walker

*Confidence and Cheerfulness*

**T**HIS is a two-minute sermon on optimism. I will begin it by defining that admirable quality as a wise combination of cheerfulness and confidence.

We may have one without the other and still be incomplete. With both we are assured of individual happiness, and we are likely to be liberal contributors to the joy of the world at large.

A good many people frown on the building of air castles. They think it a useless and wasteful occupation.

Any man or woman with an imagination will indulge in that delightful pastime, and a man or woman without an imagination is poorly equipped for this life's problems and struggles.

The best thing that was ever said about air castles came from Thoreau, that splendid New Englander and modern St. Francis of Assisi, who contributed to the joy of the world by his confidence and cheerfulness.

"If you have built castles in the air," he said, "your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. **NOW PUT FOUNDATIONS UNDER THEM.**"

Could you think of a better plan for life than that; to have the highest aspirations and seek to make them facts; to foster splendid imaginings and bring them to be realities?

One of the reasons that Diogenes never found an honest man was because living in a tub he sat on the ground.

Find for yourself a place on the heights where the air is clearer, the sunshine is brighter, the view is broader, and the world is better.

Paradoxical as it is, there is a great proportion of the human family that enjoys being unhappy.

They would not know what to do with a hearty laugh if one came to them.

The twenty-four muscles which are called into action to reproduce a smile might just as well have been left out of their anatomies.

If you read your Bible carefully you will find one phrase repeated a good many times. It is "Be of good cheer."

If you are cast down and want to read a brief sermon that seems to have been written especially for those who are low in spirits or in purse, turn to the twelfth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel and read from the twenty-second to the thirty-second verse.

Another fine passage of the Bible is the twenty-third Psalm, in which King David, poet and optimist, proclaims that "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

If you have never built an air castle become the architect of one to-day.

Build it high and big and glorious. Adorn it with your hopes and furnish it with your fondest desires and then, as Thoreau told you, **PUT FOUNDATIONS UNDER IT.**



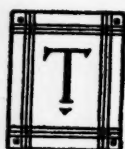
# Tiger Love

*A serial—Jungle passions clash with ultramodern civilization—Marilyn Mercer, avid for a thrill, goes faster than she had ever dreamed of going*

By Robert Terry Shannon

## CHAPTER I

### THE SENSATION-SEEKER



HE motor car reached forward through the night with a steadily increasing speed. Tom Fuller's eyes, fixed watchfully ahead, began to lose certainty as the black ribbon of the road rose and fell

and curved in the far-reaching headlight beams.

The girl beside him at the wheel fed the engine more gas with increasing recklessness, her head thrown back and her unsatisfied eyes hungry with excitement.

It was time, Fuller declared, to stop her. He was thirty years old, and his foolhardy days were on the decline.



MARILYN STOOD SUDDENLY  
SILENT, BUT DEFIANT

The girl, just twenty, was fascinating; but his car and his neck, too, were precious.

The violence, the rebellion against life, that was in her exquisite blond head puzzled him. "What is it she wants?" he asked himself. He couldn't begin to answer the problem. It gave him a dull feeling to realize that he could no longer comprehend instantly the instincts and impulses of youth—this extreme modern youth which seemed to differ rather sharply from his own.

Marilyn Mercer was thinking: "There's no kick in this car, or Tom either. It's been ages since anything has stirred me up, and I'm perishing for something. Anything—I don't care what! I'd like to do one hundred and fifty an hour in this rambling wreck!"

Moving closer, Tom Fuller touched her arm.

"Hadn't we better turn back, Marilyn?"

She didn't take her eyes from the undulating road; her bare shoulders shrugged, and her cropped sheen of gold hair tossed in a swift rushing wind. The accelerator, now, was pushed down to the limit.

"I feel like going back to the party and dancing some more," Tom suggested.

"Don't be ghastly!" the girl derided him.

The car was beginning to sway, and the road beneath felt greasy.

"This is too fast for safety, Marilyn."

"Who wants to be safe?"

Her leg reaching down to the accelerator was shapely and tense with rigid muscular force; the roar of the engine and the wind filled their ears. Tom studied her face for a moment, then found the ignition switch and turned it off. As the car slackened he restrained it with a slow, gentle pressure from the emergency brake. They brought up beside the road. Marilyn's eyes were faintly contemptuous of his caution.

"You remind me of my grandfather, Tom," she said.

"Yes?"

"Yes, he likes to sit in a soft rocking-chair and wear bedroom slippers. How long has it been since you felt alive?"

A tingle got into the man's face. Marilyn's youth, her daring, stung him with a lash of humiliation. She made him feel middle-aged and out of her sphere. A vast uneasiness stirred him when he thought of what their married life would be like. He was still young, but she was indescribably younger. Still, he hadn't slowed up as a swimmer; in tennis and polo he was at the top of his form. There was not a gray hair in his head, and he weighed precisely the same as he did ten years ago. He gave her a cigarette, and lit one himself.

"Shall we go back, Marilyn?"

She breathed deeply of her cigarette and allowed the smoke to expend itself through her lips.

"If you knew how sick I was of the gin, and the necking, and the wrestling they call dancing, you'd know how fed up with it I am. They squirm, Tom, they squirm! I've been soaked in it till I'm nauseated. There's got to be something else—and I thought maybe you could help me find it."

"Is that why you agreed to marry me, Marilyn?"

"I suppose so," she responded wearily. "You've always kept yourself in trim—you've had a body like the old Greeks. The trouble is, it be-

gins to look as if you have the soul of a jack rabbit."

Tom flushed. Through half-closed eyes he studied this splendidly warm and vigorous young creature—this perfection of youth that held, in the bud, all promise of the woman to be. He could see her throughout the years, increasing in graciousness, the chiseled marble of her being transmuting itself into resplendent tenderness. She needed an older man like him, steady, prudent.

"I don't enjoy the parties at the club so much myself."

She in turn looked at him and saw a well-featured face, sun-bronzed, with dependable gray eyes. It was funny how everybody had thought him a great catch—his money, his intelligence, his solid family. It had been rather nice to capture him.

"You're not tired only of the parties—you're all through with everything, Tom. From now on it's mechanical. Get married, settle down, have children—and wither! The idea freezes me. I want a lot more than that to happen to me. Something has got to smash me before I feel it. Life ought to be like that, Tom—it ought to be *smashing!*"

His eyes, still steady, regarded her.

"And you want me standing around conveniently to pick up the pieces?"

"Maybe there won't be any pieces. Maybe I'll go bang! And there won't be anything but dust—star dust. But I wouldn't be quite dead at that. There's something inside me that *couldn't* be killed—it wants life, and still more life. Can't you understand that, Tom?"

Tom smiled at her softly. This was all childish, yet, disturbingly, there was an undercurrent of danger.

"I can understand that you're not as savage as you think you are. You're a spoiled baby, crying for the moon. If anything smashing ever happens to you, you'd be frightened to death. What you really are is a sweet little



girl—not a wild, free soul. All of this is nothing but a sort of moral colic, and you'll get over it, never fear."

Marilyn threw back her head and laughed. "And I came near marrying you!"

"You'll marry me, all right—don't make any mistake about that."

She pulled away from his arms around her shoulders, opened the door of the car and was out into the road. "Let's walk—let's run!"

He had her by the arm, but she twisted away. Briskly, without purpose, she set off down the road. With easy strides Tom kept beside her.

"What you need," he told her, "is a good spanking."

"I'd kill you!"

"I'll get you out on the tennis court to-morrow and wear you down to a frazzle," he continued. "I can understand an excess chaser. Wait a minute—there are a couple of fellows ahead of us right there. They just stepped from behind those trees."

Marilyn laughed again. "Let's find out who they are."

"You get back to the car," Tom said sharply.

Instead, Marilyn advanced toward the two approaching figures. Immediately it was apparent that the lonely road was no longer safe. One of the strangers, with a wicked gesture, produced a revolver. They heard a husky, venomous voice.

"Stick up your hands!"

Marilyn stood suddenly silent, motionless; her shoulders touched Tom's sleeve. She was, he noted, breathing heavily. The command from the armed man was repeated gruffly.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" she declared.

Tom Fuller raised his hands to the level of his head.

"Don't mind what the girl says, men," he told the bandits. "I'm not armed, and since you have the drop on us we've got sense enough not to buck that six-shooter you're carrying."

"You better have sense," the second highwayman growled. "Where you carrying your letters, buddy?"

"Inside my coat," Fuller explained in an even voice.

Swiftly one of the men went through his pockets, taking a watch and what money there was.

"Now what you got?" A scowling, lowbred face glowered at Marilyn.

They were shabbily dressed, these robbers, and lacking entirely in any appeal to romantic imagination. Toward them Marilyn had a violent dislike.

"I haven't got a thing—no jewelry nor money," she said. "Even my compact and lip stick are back in the car."

She was conscious that her heart was beating slightly faster, but there was no fear—only intense contempt for these brutish, mean-faced jackals. The thought swirled in her mind that, had she been a man, she would have sailed into them and beaten them until they fell to the ground. Her blood would have sung at the triumph over their hammered defeat. From the corners of her eyes she saw Tom Fuller standing there, his hands raised in surrender, and she was filled with a devastating pity for him.

"That's your car back there, ain't it?"

Tom nodded.

"Well, you lost yourself a car, mister. Just keep right on walking in the direction you're going, both of you. Keep right on walking, and don't look back, or you'll get a bullet smack in the face."

"Are you going to let them get away with that?" Marilyn demanded fiercely.

Tom's face was white.

"Take the car and be damned to you!" he snarled at the highwaymen. His fingers, like iron clasps, closed around Marilyn's arm and he marched her resolutely along with him out of danger.

"Yellow!"

Darkness was all around them, and she was propelled forward by the remorseless grip on her arm. Behind them there was the sound of the car starting, and the swing of the headlight beams headed back in the direction from which it had come.

"I'd taken a sock at them if it was the last thing I did on earth, if I had been a man," the girl sneered. "What was the matter—heart failure, or just a natural lack of nerve, paralyzed by the sight of a gun?"

"You little fool—don't you realize what might have happened to you?" Tom Fuller's voice was like ice. "Alone on the road in this God-forsaken spot—they could have shot me, and God knows what might have happened to you. They could have my car and everything I've got, before I'd take a chance like that."

"You were afraid."

"You're damned right I was afraid. I'm not going to put up a battle like that just to show off in front of you or any other girl."

Their eyes became accustomed to darkness, and they could see the road stretching ahead of them, tree-bordered and dusty. Somewhere in the neighborhood they would have to find a telephone. Adventure, physical and tasteful, had at last come to Marilyn Mercer and the whole thing had been repugnant. Nothing had thrilled nor stirred her. The man at her side seemed to lose the last tremor of magnetism she had ever felt for him. Ahead of them, around a curve, came an approaching car.

"We'll flag this car and get them to take us to a phone," Fuller said. "This thing will have to be reported to the authorities at once."

It was a tame way, the civilized way, of reacting to justice. As mathematical as bookkeeping.

"All right, grandfather," she chided him.

Fuller stood in the middle of the road and waved his arm; the approach-

ing car halted with its lights full upon them, its engine vibrating.

Jeffrey Granger put his head out at the side, his sharp dark eyes attracted more to Marilyn than to the man with her. His face had something of the hawk about it, lean and dark—a countenance distinguished and saved from ferocity by an inner handsomeness, an evasive gallantry bred of strong conflicts with life and men. Older than Tom Fuller, he was still rakish—taut in line and muscle and mind.

"We've been held up and our car stolen by two highwaymen," Tom informed him. "Can you give us a lift to some place where we can get help?"

Granger touched the latch of his car door and stepped out into the road. A tall, slim, muscular figure that moved with the sleek grace of an animal.

"How long ago?"

"About two minutes ago."

"Great! Get in with me and we'll run them down."

"I'm afraid that's hardly practical. They're armed, you know," Tom remonstrated. "I was thinking, if you could take me to a phone—"

Jeffrey Granger's eyes shifted to the girl for a moment, then back to Fuller.

"I passed a road house a mile back. You can get a phone there, if you like, but why not go after your men?"

Marilyn came up to the stranger's side. Something inside her was beginning to throb.

"I'll go with you!" she said in a vibrating tone.

Tom shook his head.

"No, Marilyn, we're not exactly State troopers, you know. The phone's the thing."

Her teeth gleamed between soft, fresh lips; her eyes were enlarged and luminous.

"You can walk to the phone if you like, but I'm going in this car after them—with this man!"

Tom darkened and scowled. "No—I won't let you."

"You won't let me? Why, you


haven't a thing on earth to say about it. Go phone your State troopers if you want to."

In a flash she was inside the roadster. Granger looked at her companion with a faintly mocking smile.

"I guess that lets you out, old man. Too bad you can't join us—but somebody has to do the phoning in this world."

## CHAPTER II

### INTO THE TIGER'S LAIR

 O you think you can catch them?"

The seats in Jeffrey Granger's car were low and comfortable behind the long hood. With perilous speed they swung around a curve and straightened out on the open stretch of road ahead.

"This thing goes like a bat out of hell," he assured her.

"Aren't you afraid of highwaymen with guns?"

"They're my meat."

He drove the car with the skill of a winning jockey guiding a thoroughbred down the stretch. Despite the furious speed, he was utterly relaxed. Part of the time only one hand was on the wheel. Speed, danger, the zest of the unknown were his means of escape from the humdrum of life. The pursuit created a cold, delightful ferment in his blood. It gave him a feeling of savage happiness; he was a swooping bird of prey, a gaunt wolf, a rushing tiger.

Nature had been absent-mindedly forgetful of human progress when Jeffrey Granger was born; he was atavistic, a throwback to the barbaric man. Family respectability had tried to steer him into the narrow grooves of existence, but a tireless flame in his breast had carried him to the far places of the world.

He had fought in the Chinese army and had battled for life on a dirt floor

of a Malay hut. While his classmates from college had been finding boredom and prosperity as brokers and manufacturers, Granger had been stalking the earth. Never had he stepped outside the law, principally because he had never needed money beyond his inherited and established income.

"The man I was with—how did he strike you?" Marilyn asked suddenly.

"Faithful—the sheep dog type," Granger responded, his eyes on the road.

"How do I strike you?"

"Beautiful—and virtuous—"

"Is that all?"

"Beauty in women was created for man's enjoyment," Granger remarked impersonally, "and virtue, like a cobweb, to be brushed aside."

"You're a fast worker, aren't you?" Marilyn queried, her interest quickening.

He did not bother to glance around.

"Don't play with me, little girl, unless you're looking for trouble. You'd better stick to the shepherd dog."

Jeffrey's profile, dimly revealed from the faint dashboard light, had the sharp outline of a portrait stamped on bronze. He was so sure of himself, so utterly unimpressed by her, that the sheer exuberant confidence of her youth was shaken. There was a futile feeling that she had not even scratched his hard surface.

"You're not so ferocious," she assured him, with the subtle antagonism of her sex.

"Maybe not," he returned, with disarming modesty. "Is that your stolen car?"

Ahead, Marilyn saw Tom Fuller's car being driven at a reckless speed. Her heart began pounding.

"Yes—we've caught them!"

Incredibly, Granger's car possessed more speed, which he let out. In another minute he was running wheel to wheel with the fleeing bandits.

At the risk of all necks concerned, Granger began edging the stolen car

to the side of the road. Hoarse, wind-blown protests greeted the encroachment, but as the cars leveled out for a straight run the enemy gave ground until the off wheels were running in the rough.

Speed slackened. With cold accuracy of steering, Jeffrey Granger side-swiped the other machine and sent it definitely off the road and bumping to a halt in the strong bracken. Halting his own car, he turned rapidly and came back.

A suddenness in the action of Jeffrey Granger surprised Marilyn. There was the roaring of a deflected revolver. The smacking sound of fist blows, and one man—not Granger—fell. Life—thrill—kick! Marilyn's temples kept pounding.

A swirl and the weapon spoke again. This time Granger held it. A man was shot—rolling on the ground!

Primitive excitement inside her white bosom—twisting. Rills of sharp feeling that *hurt!*

One of the men was up again; he reeled and tossed under battering blows. From his throat came a thick, despairing cry. Jeffrey Granger, with blood on his knuckles, stood over them both, his face fiendish with joy.

The girl went over to him, her breath repressed—it was like standing close to a beautiful, killing animal—a tiger! His arm encircled her casually, and she snuggled in close to the living elasticity of his body.

"A bullet in his lungs—he'll be harmless for a long time. Too bad I didn't kill them both. When the other fellow went down, his head struck on a rock; did you notice it?"

All color had fled from Marilyn's face. He was completely, without question, cold-blooded.

"What," she asked, "are you going to do?"

"Let your friend and the constable do the mopping up. We'd better be moving along."

Because of a tumult in her breast,

Marilyn's legs were weak, and Granger half carried her to his car. All of her perceptions were blurred, stunned; she was aware only of an overwhelming magnetism in the man. They had been through a nightmare together, and he, alone, was alive and substantial.

"Where are we going?" In her question was nothing but protest—his decision would carry her where he willed.

"We'll drive on and phone back to your friend; he ought to be at the road house by now."

From a filling station, farther on, Jeffrey Granger reached Tom Fuller, and told him crisply where he could find his car and the highwaymen as well.

"But Miss Mercer—is she all right?"

"She's perfect. I'll look after her. Good-by."

In the car again, before starting, Granger paused. It was almost, she thought, as though he were giving her a last chance to get away.

"I'm going home," he said. "Do you want to go with me?"

Was this what she was seeking—would it satisfy the nameless hunger within her? The strange thing was—she had no fear of him. No man, however fascinating, could ever be her master. A vast feminine security pervaded her consciousness.

"Do you really want to take me home with you?"

"Why not?" Jeffrey demanded, with a nonchalance that was tantalizing.

His self-possession struck at her vanity with a sharp challenge. Men had always pursued her—had been thrilled by her smallest favors. It would be delicious, a biting satisfaction, to stir a supplicating warmth in this smugly dangerous creature who took so much for granted.

"The night's still young!" Marilyn agreed. "Let's go!"

Granger smiled quietly. "I thought you might be afraid."



"Need I be?"

"Some girls might be," he responded enigmatically.

This, Marilyn knew, was playing with fire. Here was thrill, kick, danger—but warm and vitalizing. Feminine intuition told her Granger was different from any man she had ever known. He was a primitive, savage thing, glossed over with the conventional polish of civilization. In his struggle with the highwaymen, Marilyn had felt, as though by telepathy, the ferocious joy that swept him.

Tom Fuller certainly would never have been capable of such jungle action.

Yet Granger outwardly possessed as much culture as any man of her acquaintance. Certain little things, so infinitesimal they could not be labeled, stamped him with good breeding. Inflections of the voice, social bearing, a motion of the hand—all the result of training and environment. He belonged definitely to the class that possessed unlimited leisure, the girl judged. Still, there was nothing soft about him.

Studying his face, as they drove along, Marilyn found him increasingly fascinating.

"Who are you?" she inquired pointedly.

Jeffrey told his name, but did not ask hers. They left the main road and drove through a narrow byway. A thin, rising moon revealed a house set amid trees. For the first time a twist of apprehension disturbed the young woman as the car came to a stop before the door.

"Bring many girls here?" she inquired, half in earnest.

"You're the first. They're scarcely worth the trouble, most of them."

"Should I be flattered?"

"Not at all. But I am flattered."

"Why?"

"Because you trust me enough to come here."

"Was I foolish?"

"Very. I'm not the chivalrous type. I've seen too many women to have any illusions left. I know what you all are."

"And what are we, please?"

"Biological necessities for men. I can't say there's anything particularly sacred about your sex."

He turned a key and swung open the front door.

"Won't you step inside?"

Marilyn's face tingled as though it had been slapped, but she was too proud to betray any weakness by hesitating. With a quick step she was inside the door, and the man's hand found a wall button. The room was glowing with light.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE



INSTANTLY she was agreeably impressed. The long, low living room with beamed ceiling was distinctly masculine in atmosphere and furnishings. It was more like a club than a home—leather chairs, a mounted moose head over the fireplace, books scattered about, hunting rifles in a corner rack.

Marilyn had never before seen quite such a room. Animal skins hung on the walls, trophies of the confirmed hunter. An orange and black tiger rug was under foot. On the table was an odd receptacle fashioned from an elephant's foot. The place was, almost, a museum. Big game—the instinct of the killer—

"Why, this is delightful!" the girl exclaimed.

Seen under his own roof, Jeffrey Granger lost something, but not all, of his usualness. Faintly he was the conventional host, but in his tall, sinuous figure Marilyn could sense the unrest that burned within him.

"I don't live here much of the time," he confided, "but everyone should have a home in some part of the world, and

this is mine. It's a place to keep my things, at least. Please sit down. Won't you have something to drink?"

From the depth of a firm, leather chair, Marilyn smiled up at her host. After all, she wondered, was he like the other fagged souls—dependent upon liquor for his pleasure of living?

"I don't need it," she assured him. "Do you?"

"Suit yourself," was the reply. "If I didn't drink in this kid glove neighborhood I suppose I'd perish." He pressed a button near the mantel, and there was a faint vibration in the distant part of the house. "I never bother with it in the tropics."

"Does your business take you there?"

"I haven't any business. I'd suffocate if I had to live long bottled up in this overcivilized life that produces people like your friend to-night."

"Tom Fuller is a little tame—but he's reliable," Marilyn answered. "I'm a product of the same civilization, too, you know."

"You're different," Granger asserted, looking at her steadily. "There's a little spirit left that hasn't been squeezed out of you. But maybe you're bluffing—we'll see."

A small, dark-faced servant appeared. He was almost, but not quite, a Japanese.

"Whisky and soda," Granger instructed him. With a queer, stiff bow the man departed.

Marilyn's attention came back to her host. She had not succeeded in dazzling him—she might rattle on if she so desired, but he would continue to dominate the situation. The eyes that gazed at her were not lit with the love that seemed to stir automatically in men alone with her. Intuition told the girl that she exerted no paralyzing glamour upon him, yet she could feel his eyes appraising her as though she were somehow delectable in his sight.

"Why did you bring me here?" she asked.

"Mainly because you wanted to come."

Instinctively she fell back upon subterfuge. "Why, I did nothing of the kind!"

"Save all your pretense for Fuller and his ilk," Granger suggested coolly. "You're wasting your time when you stall with me. Why must you women always pretend that you are not really out for a good time—when you are?"

"Do you think you are as alluring as all that?" she flung back at him.

"The temptation is within you—not within me," Jeffrey affirmed quietly. "Why not be truthful? You know you are hoping something exciting will happen."

"When a man makes love to me, it is not exactly a novelty."

"I don't intend to make love to you."

"Good! I'm rather fed up, really, with the old thing said in so many different ways. But, precisely, what is your idea, Mr. Granger?"

The servant, returning with a tray, interrupted his reply. Granger poured himself a masterful dose of liquor, flecked it with soda, and imbibed the drink as though it had no taste, no potency. Marilyn, watching him, saw that her host was the rare type of drinker who is outwardly impervious to alcohol. With a little awe she watched him. For herself one cocktail, despite her sophistication, was all she could manage without giggling.

"Your servant is an Oriental?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes. He doesn't speak English. You needn't fear he will spread scandal."

"Is there going to be any scandal?"

"Your world would call it such."

"Meaning which?"

"Meaning that I have a yen for you. Sentimental gentlemen of past generations, I believe, used to call it love. Scientists probably have another name for it. I, myself, recognize it as a sort of jungle mating instinct. It has little

to do with sentiment, and nothing at all with marriage. Merely *I want you.*"

Marilyn could feel her temples pounding slightly. Even as the man spoke, dull lights in his eyes were beginning to glow. A force, perceptible

And something else besides mere fear, feminine reluctance and feminine instinct to trim the claws of savagery, possessed her as well—a something like wanting to be stalked, conquered, won—bagged, that's what they called it, these hunting men.

What fool said that women were the real hunters and men the hunted!

For here was a man-tiger who had turned hunter. The female of the species shivered. She was suddenly frightened again. She wanted to cry out, but pride prevented her.



SHE WANTED HIM AS BADLY  
AS HE WANTED HER



to her senses, began to radiate from him.

He took a step forward. Her heart almost stood still. There was in that lithe and effortless stride all the swift directness and singleness of purpose of great cats or the hunters of them whom nothing can escape.

Stalking her in his museum of kills, she would be only another trophy hung limply on his walls.

Unable to tear her eyes from his face, the girl saw, in a flash, all those walls again, and then, suddenly, his face was nearer still. The blaze of savage suns was in it.

All the age old passion of primordial men seemed to rush out at her from him, and something she had never felt before rose in her to meet it, even as she fought it down. And it rose disguised as a daring impulse to tame the untamable thing before her—the commonest and most dangerous impulse a woman can feel!

Masculine eyes, nearer, ever nearer, seized on hers. They held. She wanted to tear hers away. She couldn't.

His breath came in little hot gasps. His eyes bored through her, hot, compelling, winning. She wouldn't meet them. She would tear hers away. But she could—couldn't—she couldn't. She could only close them.

Her eyelids began to droop, droop—no, my God, she mustn't close her eyes! That was surrender. In one pounce he would be on her—and she would be—oh, well, what difference did it make?

She wanted him as badly as he want-

ed her. She couldn't fight him off another minute— "*It has little to do with sentiment, and nothing at all with marriage. Merely I want you—*"

Her courage was at the breaking point. The man came closer and, strangely, she felt herself rising from the chair to meet him. A subconscious force, vital and dominant, was taking charge of the situation. His arms suddenly went around her; a shuddering sweetness of sensation swept her with a firelike rush. Their lips now blended together firmly, softly, in tingling wildness. Time ceased to exist.

*Biff! Bang! Bang!*

Dazed, Marilyn shook herself, like a sleeper awakening, and found that some one, imperiously disdaining bells, was pounding, pounding at the door. Granger stepped swiftly away from her, and straightened his shoulders. A puzzled frown creased his forehead.

An ironic laugh sounded somewhere within her. She must have laughed aloud.

The man whirled and looked at her, a little differently, as though he were seeing, for the first time, a person and a woman instead of a female and a mate.

"Good!" he said quietly; the frown vanished. "You're better than I thought. There is more to you than meets the eye."

He moved toward the door, just as his servant passed noiselessly through the hall in front of him. Tom's voice sounded in the entry.

Marilyn Mercer rose quickly and unconsciously put her hand to her hair. With that motion she was completely herself again.

The feminine yearning for security that lay beneath her craving for excitement was stronger now than she could ever remember having felt it before, yet hitherto she had never been so near the brink. And the next time? Every bit of the savagery that was in her knew there *would* be a next time.

"My God, here you are!"

Fuller's voice had an absurdly safe and hollow ring in this room of danger. He stood in the doorway, staring incredulously at her. She had never before seen him so disheveled.

Still, he managed to look respectable. He had no hat, and his hair was damp and plastered in little comic strands on his forehead. He was muddy; had evidently stepped into a puddle somewhere along the line. He had all the appearance of a man brought up suddenly and somewhat unexpectedly after a long, hard run.

Her eyes caught Granger's. Suddenly she realized they were both thinking the same thing.

Tom was funny! She burst into a laugh. The ludicrous astonishment on his face increased. She went off into peals of laughter, a let-down that definitely bordered on hysteria.

"Behold!" she gasped, pointing at him. "The answer to a maiden's prayer!"

Tom flushed, turned slowly and glared at his rival. The eyes of the two men locked, and for a moment the room was held in a breath-taking silence. Fuller broke in with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Come on," he ordered Marilyn. "If any thanks are in order," he said curtly to Granger, "please accept them."

Granger smiled, shrugged his shoulders without reply. Marilyn stepped forward, passed swiftly between the two men, and went down the steps to the car standing in front of the door. It was Tom's, hauled out of the ditch where Granger had forced it with the two bandits.

"Good-by," she called to Granger.

"Good-by?" he flung back at her.

The question remained hanging in the night, even after the car had started and was swirling down the long, dark driveway and out into the State road again.

They had gone two miles before Tom spoke.



"I'll admit it was a nervy thing Granger did with those crooks. Oh, boy, what a grand stand play it was! But what unnecessary danger it put you in!" His voice was sulky.

"It was one of the finest things I ever saw in my life," the girl replied.

"Fine!" he snorted. "He got away with it only through luck."

But her mind was occupied with sensation—her lips still tingled from the hunter's kiss. *That* was important.

"I don't like that chap Granger," Tom persisted.

"I do," she retorted cruelly.

"He's a bad egg."

"I suppose so, but he's *different*."

"Are you falling for him, Marilyn?"

"Maybe."

"But he's half-crazy, dear. I'm warning you—"

"Let me tell you something, Tom Fuller," she said slowly; "the world is kept alive by men who take chances. They're the conquerors. And the rest of us—we're just grubworms."

"Remember one thing—"

"Oh, remember Lindbergh, and let it go at that!" she cut in, and Tom was silent.

And in silence they completed the rest of the way to her house.

"Are you going to see that man again?" he asked, for no apparent reason, as he stopped at her door.

Marilyn got out and looked at him.

"I'll be mighty surprised if I don't," she said and ran up the steps.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WANTED



MARILYN went to the Country Club a little earlier than usual the next afternoon, and found there considerably more than the usual number of women clustering the veranda and tea tables. She felt herself assailed by curious glances; her appearance gave an electric stimu-

lus to the buzz of conversation. Instinctively, her head went a little higher.

Well, Granger and Fuller had been able to keep the news out of the papers, save for a terse noncommittal hospital report of the entry of two battered bandits, but the substance of the matter, connecting her name with the event, had already been broadcast over the rumor radio.

Helen Stevens swanked over to her—Helen, just a bit over nineteen, small, winsome, blond, blue-eyed, and pretty enough to eat—and she had all the suppressed force of an innocence which at any moment might go *pop*.

"Listen, Marilyn," she purred, "just what kind of hullabaloo did you pull off last night on the old high-road?"

"Who told you?"

"Who didn't? What I mean, the gist of the matter is abroad, but I want all the gory details, so deliver."

It was disconcerting. This curiosity, relentlessly pressing in on Marilyn's senses, kept Jeffrey Granger focused in her mind. Already people were linking them together. Why, he was known even at the club—an associate member. Abruptly, she knew why she had come to the club to-day. Solely to see him.

She barely knew his name, and, with a start, remembered he had never asked for hers. Had Tom told him when he called police headquarters from the filling station? The man was practically a stranger to her—and yet—and yet—well, who ever thought of introducing a tiger and a hunter to each other?

"What's he like?" Helen pressed on eagerly.

Well, what *was* he like?

"Oh, like most any other man with a little more blood than a toasted cracker."

What a whopper that was. That lean, predatory, tiger-stalking creature like any other man! She remembered his room—lair, more properly. That den of blood trophies. She shivered a

moment in recollection. It was uncanny the way she had of picturing herself—a limp pelt, a casual common prize, hung up there among his other symbols.

Fuller came up on the veranda; immaculate and safe and sane in natty golf togs. He paused and crossed toward her.

Marilyn felt a moment's relief that he was not somebody else; followed immediately, however, by an almost physical pang of disappointment. She had to force herself to answer his greeting civilly, and then it was not so civil.

"Oh, Tom, don't bother me, please!"

A little later she abruptly stood up, the blood heavy at her temples. The thought, the simple cutting certainty, that Granger was not going to put in an appearance here, struck her. It was unbearable, unbelievable, and yet she knew he wouldn't come to-day.

She was down on the drive and almost to her roadster before she checked herself. Where was she going? She knew. She was going to his house to find out why he wasn't coming to her. No! Men had to seek her out. They had always done so. So would he have to.

It took more will power than Marilyn Mercer had ever before exerted in her life to retrace her steps, and slowly walk back to the chair she had abandoned.

Fuller's eyes fixed themselves quizzically upon her.

"Decided to wait a bit longer?" he drawled.

She nearly threw a glass at him. What made stupid men so damned intuitive at times?

"I'm not the waiting kind," she parried.

"I am," he said, almost smugly.

A car burned up the driveway and sent gravel flying in its halt. Marilyn's heart leaped, and a hot glow rose in her. She had to force herself to

keep from looking around.

The next moment Jimmy Buxton's adolescent semitenor naseled out a group greeting. Just another meaningless boy. His mother, Sybil Buxton, rose—she looked as young as her son. Marilyn hated both of them, suddenly, because they were not some one else.

"That kid, Jimmy," said Fuller, reflectively, "would make a swell bandit chaser."

What had got into Tom? He was getting keener than a woman. This was intolerable. She held herself in a chair. A few minutes later was rewarded by the arrival of another car, a big black sedan, driven by a familiar chauffeur, and her father waved to her from the tonneau.

The girl wanted to kiss him for liberating her from that veranda and giving her the chance of retreating, so to speak, without defeat, along with him.

Nevertheless, she almost startled her father into a premature grave by staying home that night. Everybody in the world seemed to telephone but—but the only person who at the moment mattered anything in the world. She knew Jeffrey Granger wouldn't telephone, of course—but, after all, he might, mightn't he?

Yet he was terribly hard to picture on the other end of a wire, or at the end of any tether.

"Hello? Miss Mercer? This is Mr. Granger. I just thought I'd call, you know, and when can I see you again? I wanted to learn how you—"

What the devil did he care how she was! What had he called her? A biologic necessity! "There is nothing sacred about your sex." Well, who ever wanted it sacred? "Come, come, come, you fool, and take me away from here—don't, don't telephone—just come!"

How easily she had invented the conversation!

She lay in bed and listened. There was a little wind, and a maple branch

scraped the side of the house outside her room, but she heard only her heart beat. Or she heard a couple of shots. Or she heard his breath come, go, in quickened pace. Coming ever closer, that sunburned, passion-swept face with its glowing, attacking eyes.

She lay flat, tense, her legs stretched out rigid, staring across the forgotten centuries of plodding civilization into the eternal untamed past. And suddenly his face was gone!

But he was on the way. No—it was all imagination.

A dog barked. Again, a little nearer, she thought. She felt as though it was on her trail. Advance of a hunter pursuing her— Those, his walls—those vivid chronicles of the chase and the kill.

And then a blues song lifted itself in her mind— “You’d make a hound dawg lose his trail.” Would she? Could she? Yet keep to the chase, hunting keenly. Or had the tables turned, she hunting and he the pursued? What was she waiting for? All things come to him who waits. Rot. Who wants all things? She turned the pillow savagely, it burned, it was so hot, and kicked her legs around.

She started and listened. Now she knew what she was waiting for. A stone, a handful of gravel thrown against her window pane as Jimmy Buxton’s car had thrown it against the side of the club veranda.

My God! Was she, too, a kid back in boarding school? But still she listened. There it came again! But it was only the scraping of the maple twigs along the wall outside. She relaxed. “I’ve got a yen for you.” Yen— Funny word—

*Brrrr-rrrr!*

She started.

*Brrrr-rrrr!*

She reached out and picked up the telephone.

“Hello—hello? Hello, Helen— What? Do I want to play some tennis? My God! What? No, nothing.

I merely said it was a nice morning for something or other. You said tennis, didn’t you? Tennis!”

She gave a short, bitter laugh.

“All right, then. Be over in an hour. G’-by.”

She set the instrument down, and sank back and stared at the ceiling.

“Tennis—I ask you!”

## CHAPTER V

### TRIMMING THE TIGER’S CLAWS



T all started just like one more day. After all, what were the Creightons. The answer is: just one more dance.

The grounds were lovely, the night almost too beautiful to be true. There was just the right kind of moon. Marilyn was glad she had come, and wondered vaguely that for most of the day she had been undecided about putting in an appearance. She sat for a moment in the automobile, drinking it all in.

The lighted house at her left was alive with voices and laughter and music; to her right, the soft sweep of lawn running down to a combed and brushed beach, and beyond that a motionless moon-caressed sea. Maybe it was tame, but—but, once in awhile, tameness, too, had its place in the sun, or should she say, moon. Marilyn went indoors.

Everybody made directly for the bar. She took two drinks, one right after the other, and looked sidewise at Tom Fuller.

One had to admit Tom was handsome. She had scarcely admitted it when Helen, who was about six high-balls up on the party, made her way over and started pawing him. What a little clinging mass of *It* she was!

Marilyn turned abruptly away from them, and started dancing with Phil Creighton.

She kept right on dancing with him, and began to get a kick out of it.

Edythe Creighton was fiendishly jealous, and Marilyn wanted to make a lot of people suffer.

But after a time this back-handed comfort began to fail her, and the whole business palled. All dusty. What a kid glove civilization it was! It just didn't lead anywhere. Or at best, you got tanked up and ended in a necking party up some dark lane a hundred yards from the butcher's son out with his girl in a Ford delivery truck.

The orchestra went into a moaning shuffling blues.

I must have that man . . .

It struck her with unusual meaning, and, casting a glance at the door, Marilyn almost stopped short in her step.

Lean, lithe, sleek in evening clothes, the tiger had entered the room!

He's only human, he can be had,  
I must have that man . . .

He stalked on through the twining, twisting couples, and women's eyes followed him, drawn to him as though pulled that way, but he paid no attention to them. Instead, he prowled, seemingly unaware, and yet, as Marilyn knew, seeing everything and—she knew it, she *knew* it!—looking for her.

Suddenly, as Jeffrey's eyes veered round to where, in the next moment, he must see the girl, she looked away.

A warm glow of triumph welled up; Marilyn realized he had found her, and was staring at her.

She looked casually around again, and now the tiger took his eyes away. By an all but imperceptible relaxation, by just the faintest easing of his stride, he moved across the room away from her. She knew she had won. The game was on again from a new angle.

She threw herself into dancing with complete joy and abandon, and made no attempt to approach him. At every turn she was vividly aware of the impression he was making on every other woman in the room. Helen scurried out of a group milling about her and

made a dead set for him. The next moment they were off in a dance together.

Marilyn had been glad of the protection of others until this moment. Now she was beginning to be piqued by the concerted stampede toward Jeffrey Granger. Almost involuntarily she edged her partner round until they were following Jeffrey. The latter turned sharply as though he sensed her nearness.

"Oh, there you are!" he said, seemingly surprised to see her.

She merely nodded, and smiled cryptically.

"You can be had! You can be had!" her heart was singing.

Helen clung to him, her baby face eternally turned up invitingly to his eyes, appealing, begging, offering. It got on Marilyn's nerves after an hour, and drove her out into the open. Enveloped in a delicious premonition of danger, yet bold in her sense of crowd protection, she suddenly made her way across the room directly to him.

For a moment they stood eye to eye.

"You fit very well into this kid glove civilization," she mocked. She touched his arm. "Come on," she said, "let's try some air."

They went out on the lawn, and strolled down to the beach. With the light of the house still on them, he put his arm around her, carelessly, almost perfunctorily, and for some minutes the couple walked on.

They stopped in front of a long, low, dark object lying on the beach. It was one of the Creighton canoes. The man looked at the girl inquiringly.

"What do you say?" he asked, making a gesture from the canoe to the sea.

"Why not?" she replied.

In a moment he had it turned over and afloat, whereupon she stepped into it and seated herself on the bow cross-piece. There was a grunt of releasing sand, the little vessel darted out on the silvered waters. Marilyn did not hear her companion get in, and had to turn



to reassure herself that he was actually with her.

"Where to?" he challenged.

"Wherever you say."

"Wherever I say?"

"Yes, and as far as you like, Mr. Granger."

"You seem to feel very safe in a canoe."

"Safer than I would on an ocean liner, perhaps."

"Not large—but it makes a man keep his distance. That the idea?"

"Perhaps."

"I think I could get around that."

"I am sure you could—Only—" she halted.

"Ah, an only! Only what?"

"I imagine you're more at home on land," Marilyn smiled. "I don't think water is quite your element."

"Oh, you may find I'm quite at home on the water, too."

"Very likely, only I don't picture you there so vividly."

"Then you *do* picture me?"

"Why not?"

"Thanks. Shall we set out for Spain?"

"If you like," she agreed carelessly.

"But I think that rock over there would be more practicable, don't you?"

"Still a bit civilized, aren't you?"

"I wonder. However, I noticed you also wearing evening clothes to-night."

They glided over the surface in an even lunge, so noiselessly that Marilyn failed even to detect the drip from his paddle or the swish of the water. Yes, very likely, he was equally at home on the water.

The rock was one of Creighton's tiny islets, perhaps a quarter of an acre in size. They grounded delicately on the tiny fringe of sand which came out on the lee side, and the girl got out.



SHE STARTED  
AND LISTENED.  
NOW SHE KNEW!

Jeffrey drew the canoe a little out of the water and followed her to the top of the rock.

They stood for a few minutes looking out over the unruffled ocean. Suddenly he sat down and, seizing both her hands, drew her down to him.

Odd—she felt herself sinking; at loose ends and at the mercy of every passion in the world. Everything Marilyn had felt that night in his room, in addition to everything she had felt since, rose in wild tumult.

As his face drew near hers, panic swept over her. She gave a sudden, frantic twist, and was out of his arms and on her feet. He gazed up at the devil of a mocking laugh in her eyes.

"Shall we set out for Spain?"

The girl stood there, panting.

"Maybe—maybe a canoe is safer?"

"Oh, then it's safety you want?" His tone was amused.

"No, no!" she protested. "It's something else—something you would not understand."

"What do *you* know that I wouldn't understand? Sit down, you little fool, do you hear me?"

Her legs grew weak. Amazed at herself, half hypnotized, Marilyn obeyed. His face came forward, close to hers, the eyes blazing this time, not with passion, but with all the tremendous will power he was exerting on her.

"Listen to me, and get this straight in your own mind and stop fooling yourself. You've never fooled me, not for a minute, and you never will. I want you as much as you want me. And you want me like the very devil, more than you have ever wanted any man or thing in your life. I haven't been out of your thoughts a minute since I met you. You've been expecting me every minute since we parted. Well, here I am, and what about it? Are you ready?"

"I—I—" she faltered; "there's such a thing—thing as love, that you don't seem to take into account."

"I don't, because the thing you mean isn't worth taking into account. I wouldn't marry the best woman who ever lived, and you're far from the best I've ever seen. Because no woman in the world is worth my freedom to me, and I'm not a man who can be made a tabby cat of, or put between any female's four walls."

"I don't think you're a man at all; you're a beast!"

Jeffrey stared at her, pounded her with his mind.

"Never mind about that. Here are you, and here am I, and what about it? Are you going to quit on all your own instincts, desires and needs, and go on drooling the law of the tabby cats and the orange blossoms to me? Let me tell you something—"

For the second time she abruptly tore herself away, and stood up, a few paces from him.

"I don't know when you're more dangerous—when you hunt with a gun or with words!"

"Here, come back here!"

But she was already running down the rock, toward the canoe, and when she heard him behind her, ran still faster. Just as she reached it, she all but fell, but caught herself on the little craft, and the impetus of her fall gave enough additional power to send the canoe smartly out from the beach in one shove.

He made a grab for her, but his hand missed, clutching only the silken belt of her gown. It ripped apart, and he stood there holding it and cursing to himself.

She shot the canoe ahead with a few swift strokes, then turned and called back to him:

"I told you I didn't think water was your proper element. All the big cats are afraid of it really. But you'd be surprised how it can cool you off. Come on in; the water's fine!"

"By God!" he said, almost venomously. "I'll tame you if it takes the rest of my life!"

Without looking back again, she sent the canoe across the motionless silent water to the beach. She had thwarted and abandoned him—had made him ridiculous!

Nor did she turn when she reached shore, but alighted and ran up to the house.

At the very door she ran into Tom Fuller.

"Where you been?" he growled. "I've been looking all over for you."

"Oh, surely not all over."

"And I noticed that fellow—"

"Oh, dance, dance with me!"

She literally swept him along on the floor.

"What's got into you?"

"Happiness—just happiness, that's all!"

"You've been up to something."

"Haven't I, though!"

"What have you been doing?"

"Pulling a tiger's whiskers."

"I wish you'd talk sense for just a minute. Out with it now. What have you been doing?"

"I tell you, I've been pulling a tiger's whiskers, trimming his claws, knotting his tail, cooling his hot jungle blood and generally—"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mercer," a steely, suave voice sounded behind her, and she could feel herself growing pale; "but I think this belt belongs to you. I only hope I didn't injure your dress in any way. Forgive me if I seemed too rough."

## CHAPTER VI

### WHY GIRLS WALK HOME

MARILYN turned as in a trance. The room had grown wider and absolutely silent, with every eye on her and the newcomer.

Jeffrey Granger stood before her, dripping wet, the dark threat of his eyes piercing her through and through. Water might not be his natural element, but it had not deterred him.

"My God, Granger!" Tom blurted out. "It seems to me you're implying something—"

"My dear man," and Jeffrey's voice was even colder and steelier, "I am implying nothing."



HE SAID, ALMOST VENOMOUSLY: "I'LL TAME YOU!"

If he were dangerous before, he was a thousand times more so now. His wet clothes clung revealingly to every line and bulge of his resilient muscles, and there was a tiny rhythmic movement in his arms which fascinated her with terror. He was a man who had never been made a fool of before. He was a man who would not take it lying down the first time. Trim his claws! She had only set them on edge.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" Tom demanded sharply.

She forced herself between the two men.

"It serves me right, whatever he means, Tom. In your way," she said, turning to Jeffrey, "I'll certainly say you're devilishly game. A woman is certainly on her own with you. You are not handicapped by any of the traditions, are you, for my sacred sex?"

"In that case, then," he bowed and

indicated Tom, "I'll leave you to the comfort of a great tradition."

"Why, you cad, you—"

"What did you say, Fuller?"

"You heard—"

She threw her arms around Tom, and held him away.

"Go, go, go now!" she pleaded with Jeffrey. "I tell you, I admit you were right—but go!"

He stood for a moment coldly estimating her, and turned on his heels and walked out.

Something undoubtedly left with him, but certainly a distinct relaxation took its place. She danced furiously for a couple of hours, and patronized Creighton's bar.

Then abruptly, while it was still early, she was seized with a desire to go home. She separated Fuller from Helen. Helen's genius for throwing herself at any new man was only equaled by her talent for getting under way, without the loss of a moment, with the first likely replacement that came along. Marilyn made Tom go with her.

They walked along the drive to the large gravel space behind the house, and picked out Tom's car. Just as he had fitted the key into the lock, a servant came running up.

"Mr. Fuller, you're wanted on the telephone."

Tom looked wonderingly at Marilyn, shrugged his shoulders, got out again, and followed the man.

He had hardly disappeared around the corner of the house when some one literally sprang from behind the car, and before she could make an exclamation, slipped behind the wheel beside her. Her heart stopped. It was Jeffrey!

He looked at her with a grim smile.

"So you think you trimmed my claws, eh?"

The engine started. The next moment the car swerved out of the line in a clean forward leap that took them around the house and into the State

road before any one remarked their departure.

They were up to sixty before Marilyn could even think of something to say, and by that time she had lost the desire to argue. She could only wait. Curiously, she wasn't half as frightened as she might have been, or perhaps should have been.

Sixty-five, seventy.

Again, as on that first night, the utter ease and nonchalance with which he drove, fascinated her. He kept Fuller's car on a more even keel than Tom could have done, and the road uncurred itself behind them like spinning ribbon pulled out from under them by a vast and invisible hand which never trembled.

"I was right." She was surprised how coolly she spoke. "The land is your proper element."

"Oh, I have won a few cups in the water," he answered matter-of-factly.

"Nevertheless," she insisted, "you are not as at home there as you would be in the jungle."

Jeffrey did not reply to this, hitting a sharp corner without abating a jot of his speed. They drove on for another hour, and the girl found herself actually relaxing in his presence. Only a vaguely fearful doubt throbbed within her as to the end of all this. It came abruptly.

He stopped the car a hundred yards from the main road up a lane. He turned off the ignition, drew out his cigarette case, and offered her one. She lighted it with the car lighter, and passed the cord to him. He let it snap back and took a long puff.

"Well, here we are, and now you and I are going to have a show-down."

"Yes?"

"Oh, very much yes."

She took a long, deep draw on her cigarette.

"Let me tell you something," she said quietly, but her voice for the first time matching his in steeliness; "if you touch me here, you'll be sorry."



"Well, I hadn't thought of that, but since you've put it that way, what else can I do but touch you? But what had you thought of doing, if I might ask?"

"Oh," she said easily, crossing her legs and leaning back comfortably, "I'll think of something when the time comes."

He leaned toward her and looked intently at her. She did not move.

"Do you know, damn it, sometimes I nearly like you."

"That's all right, too. Sometimes I nearly like you."

"But you understand, of course, that that little matter of a rock entirely surrounded by water has got to be adjusted. You do understand, don't you?"

"I understand you a little better, so naturally I assume that it has. But how?"

"I had all sorts of plans, when we started out in this car of your friend's, but they seem a bit fantastic now. I'll tell you what we'll do," Mr. Granger suggested brightly, as though the idea were something startlingly new that had just occurred to him. "You'll kiss me and we'll call it all off for to-night."

Marilyn took another long draw on her cigarette, and tossed it away.

"No go," she said briefly. "I have absolutely no intention of kissing you."

Her hand stole out and clasped the handle of the door.

"I think I can persuade you differently."

He leaned closer, and as he did so the door opened. She was standing in the road, looking at him with a tantalizing laugh.

He seemed faintly astonished.

"You really mean it?"

She nodded back brightly at him.

"You know," he said, a little wonderingly, "you're probably a good sport personally, but all you women are alike under the skin."

"Yes, yes," she mocked. "Go on."

"The only thing you can think of when you don't want to kiss a man in

an automobile is to walk home. I had really expected a little bit more of you."

Jeffrey got out of the car and stood beside her. The girl retreated a step. He suddenly seized her in his arms and drew her to him.

"Don't be a little fool, Marilyn!"

She freed her hand and brought it up resoundingly against his cheek. He made a leap at her, but she eluded him and ran away, then turned in the headlight's glare and looked at him.

"That was just an inspiration," she laughed.

"I'm going to give you about thirty seconds," he said heavily, "to come back here and get into this car. Otherwise you'll walk home."

She stood silent a moment, then waved her hand at him.

"So long!" she called, and turned around and set off away from the car.

## CHAPTER VII

### TOM MAKES A FAUX PAS



RANGER followed slowly behind her in the machine for more than a mile until the lane branched into the main road, but Marilyn did not turn again to face him.

They came to Alveron, and still without so much as giving him a look, she crossed the street and went into the little hotel there.

No one would ever be able to divine Jeffrey Granger's thoughts that night as he drove home alone; in all probability he never became clear about them himself. Only this much is known definitely: he drove Fuller's car back to the Creighton's and left it there unobserved. Then he must have got back into his own, which he had left parked somewhere in the neighborhood. About three-quarters of an hour after he had left Marilyn, he was sitting in his room sipping neat brandy.

The doorbell rang. He opened it himself. He did not seem particularly

surprised to see Marilyn standing there. A machine was drawn up before the house, but no one else was in it. She had hired it in the village for this one occasion.

She was holding something out to him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Granger, but I think this cigarette case belongs to you. I only hope I didn't injure your feelings in any way. Forgive me if I seemed to play rough."

He was probably as near stupefaction as he had ever been in his life as he took the case from her. How the devil had the woman managed to get hold of it anyhow?

She spun on her heels and ran down to the car. He started and sprang down after her. She was already behind the wheel. He grasped her wrist in an iron grip.

"Say, listen," he said, "what are you doing to-morrow night? Got anything on?"

"Why—no—I mean I've got a date with Tom Fuller."

"Ah, now, listen! You can see that old tradition any time. Listen, now, I want to see you to-morrow night, don't you understand? I've got to see you to-morrow night."

"Really I can't say now. I really can't. I must think about it. Maybe I'll let you know."

Tom was waiting for Marilyn on her father's veranda. They went inside. He looked like a towering statue of all the outraged traditions.

"Were you off with that rotter again?"

"What rotter are you talking about?"

"I'm not going to soil myself mentioning his name."

"Oh, mention it just once, Tom. I bet you a nickel it won't hurt you. Go ahead; be a sport!"

"Marilyn, for Heaven's sake, don't you realize I love you? Don't you realize how cheap you're making yourself?"

"How can I make myself cheap when you hold me so dear?"

"Now you listen to me. This man Granger is a rotter clean through. I won't say he goes so far as to boast about his conquests, but he certainly makes a practice of raising the devil with every woman he meets. Creighton knows him of old. He's got a string of women behind him. Why, just to-night he was bragging that he would never marry even if matrimony were the only thing standing between him and the electric chair."

"You know, Tom, every time I begin to get fed up on Mr. Granger, you start interesting me in him all over again."

"Don't be cheap. I tell you that fellow isn't fit to associate with any decent woman."

"No? Wait a minute."

She picked up the telephone and called a number. As she waited for the response he sat rigid, glaring at her. She sat back, her knees crossed, her delicate pointed slipper moving backward and forward tantalizingly, invitingly.

"Hello!"

She sat bolt upright.

"Mr. Granger—Jeffrey? Oh, Jeffrey, this is Marilyn. About to-morrow. Will you do me the honor of dining with us at seven? Yes? Fine. Good night!"

She put the receiver down, and looked at Tom.

"I'll have Helen over, too, for you," she said sweetly.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TIGER'S MATE



HAT would it seem like to have him come into her house? Marilyn had a wild idea of hanging her walls with fraternity emblems, college pennants, and empty candy boxes. As she looked back over a few years, she felt she

could establish a museum of kills all her own.

She laughed. What head-hunters girls were! All of it jungle. Scalp hunting. The collecting instinct—pelts—skins—tusks—feathers—orchids—jewelry—lace—silk. Trophies.

To her surprise, Marilyn's dad had known Granger's father.

"He was an engineer. Had some money of his own. Married a French woman. Rich, too. And a devil, too. Did I say he was a devil—especially with women!"

"He comes by it naturally then," the daughter mused.

"Eh, what? Oh, yes, the son. Devil, too, what? Must be, otherwise you wouldn't have him here. Listen," Mr. Mercer added suddenly, "why the deuce do you have this fellow Fuller around here so much? Are you going to marry him?"

"Why, father, I'm engaged to Tom."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said impatiently, "but are you going to marry him?"

"Honestly, dad, I don't know. Why?"

"Bore me to death," he grunted, and moved off.

Evidently Jeffrey did not bore him. For the first time that she could remember some man that Marilyn had brought into the house actually seemed to interest her father, and the old man became sprightly. She was a little surprised to find out how much he really knew, how interestingly he could talk on various subjects.

A little surprised, too, to learn that all of Jeffrey's jungle stalking was not the outcome of merely a killer's instinct, but had a purpose. Most of it had been done in association with mining and railroad matters, and along with scientific expeditions.

Helen never took her baby eyes off Jeffrey Granger all through the dinner. Fuller took particular pains never to address a remark directly to him. Be-

hind all their conversation she could feel Jeffrey and Tom estimating each other, feeling each other out, fencing with each other.

Suddenly a funny thought struck her. What a thrilling battle those two could make of it! Civilization *versus* jungle. Primitive vigor *versus* strength of position and tradition and righteousness. Marilyn thrilled to the idea of their combat.

"What a little jungle cat I am!" she said to herself.

The conversation swung round to women.

"If you had to do it all over, Mr. Mercer," Jeffrey inquired coolly, "would you marry again?"

It rather stumped her father, she thought. He shot an inquiring, almost guilty look at Marilyn.

"Oh, don't mind me, dad," said the daughter.

"M-m! Don't know," he replied to Jeffrey.

The latter laughed softly.

"I'm answered," he said, and launched out into an easy devastating speech against marriage.

When he was all through, Marilyn said:

"I take it you don't believe in marriage?"

"You can take it or leave it."

"But what would become of the human race?" pouted Helen.

"What race?" he asked politely.

"The civilization handicap," Tom Fuller growled.

"I should say it was," said Jeffrey, letting his eye rest on Tom a speculative moment.

The tiger sat on the settee on the veranda after dinner, and Helen immediately snuggled down beside him. When that girl had got so near that it seemed impossible she could get any nearer, Marilyn detected a new miracle of natural law. She was able to decrease the nonexistent distance between her and the man by half. Her hands fluttered all around Jeffrey. At last

Marilyn could stand it no longer. She stood up.

"Let's go down to the Point. To Dick Commack's."

A long narrow trestle bridge stretched over the low tide marsh to the Point. Most of it was taken up by a tremendous wooden barracks looking out over the sea. This was Dick Commack's Casino, expensively famous for food and drink. Upstairs one could play roulette to the tune—or discord—of ten or twenty thousand dollars a night—or what have you.

Jeffrey belied either his reputation with women or an old proverb. For every dollar Fuller dropped, he picked up twenty.

The men became engrossed in the game. Somehow it became a personal issue between them. She wanted air, and went out and sat on the lawn overlooking the ocean. Helen stayed with the men.

By and by Fuller came out. He was glum. He had lost heavily, but Marilyn knew that wasn't the reason. Evidently Jeffrey must have won.

They sat together, with few words, for almost an hour. When Tom spoke she didn't listen. Her ear was set to catch the step of another man. She knew he would come out any moment. Only he didn't.

Suddenly the girl rose and went in to look for him, but he wasn't there. She looked all around. She couldn't find Helen, either. Then she bethought herself of his car. That, too, was gone.

Surprisingly Fuller was more perturbed over the situation than she had expected.

"You mean to say that Helen has gone off with that bounder!"

"You seem just as worried as though it had been me."

"More, really. You're different than she is. You can take care of yourself—if you want to."

"Is this where I thank you?"

"You wouldn't understand it—but

I want any woman I know and think anything about at all—out of that fellow's hands."

"Drive to his house," she said suddenly.

He drove faster than she had ever seen him drive before. Somehow, it didn't seem to feel as fast as when Jeffrey drove. It lacked that swishing smoothness of true speed that the tiger man achieved.

"I wish I had Jimmy Buxton driving for me," she remarked.

That paid him back for that afternoon on the club veranda.

Granger's home was dark. Marilyn rang the bell. The Oriental came out and said his master was not in. He offered to let them wait.

The girl got back into the car and she and Tom cruised without purpose along the road for an hour, then he took her home.

She was not angry at Jeffrey. Not even angry at Helen. Helen—she just didn't matter. Marilyn was just heart-sick, filled with a sodden heaviness of despair.

She rose early and went down to the beach. After a swim she could think better. A thought did come to her in the water and she hurried out, dressed and drove over to Helen.

Helen was at breakfast with her mother. Jeffrey had dropped her there considerably earlier than Marilyn and Tom had left the Point. The mother had still been up. Helen herself was evasive and aloof, for the first time Marilyn knew her to be self-conscious. But Mrs. Stevens verified the story beyond all possibility of doubt.

Where had Jeffrey gone afterward? Prowling alone in his car over dark roads? But a great deal of that heaviness within Marilyn was gone.

"Well, I've got to be running now." She stood up briskly. "See you tonight at the party."

"What are you going to wear?" Helen asked.

"I can't tell you yet."



"You mean you won't."

"No, I simply don't know."

Marilyn approached the whole idea of the costume dance at the club very differently. It was the most elaborate dance of the season. She got out the costumes of two previous years and studied them. She thought it over. She was almost on the point of telephoning Jeffrey and asking him to loan her one of his skins. A surer instinct came to her aid. An instinct which told her to put on lace.

She went over to Sybil Buxton's, and came away with probably the most decorous costume that had ever been dreamed of by any woman under fifty of her set for the last twenty years. She came late, but Jeffrey Granger wasn't there yet.

Club and lawns were beautiful as a fairy pageant. The night twinkled with color and music and gay voices. It was an evening as beautiful as the one of the Creighton dance. There was, almost, spiritual fitness in the way in which people revealed themselves in the costumes they chose. Famous legs hid behind chiffon. Infamous legs were suddenly flashed at an aggrieved world out of the briefest of ballet skirts or matters that can be described as even briefer.

Marilyn tried to keep from waiting for him, but somehow her eye was fastened on the door when he entered. She started, because he had come with Helen, and ironically enough, or possibly through a keener intuition than she had ever given Helen credit for, that delectable child was garbed in a leopard skin and nothing else, but the trim breathless twinkling legs, bare and white and almost sinfully round, struck out at a whole world of men.

Thank God, she herself had put on this delicate dream of lace, which drooped modestly in sheer foam to her ankles!

Helen was triumphant in nature's tights. She even exceeded herself. She

kept Jeffrey by her, and even drew Tom into her train.

"Damn the kid!"

Marilyn looked searchingly at Jeffrey. The man didn't live who would be fool enough to resist Helen altogether, or to absurd limits.

Making a bee line for the group, Marilyn stopped just short. The tiger came after her. She knew she was drawing him on more than she had ever drawn him before. She realized down to the very roots of her being that she herself, in decorous lace, was reaching out into the very depths of his being as Helen in bare legs never could. Yet for every dance he danced with her, he danced three with Helen. At the end, he danced quite pointedly with Helen only.

Suddenly she saw them leave the hall together before a dance stopped. The longest moments of her life were the few remaining bars of that dance. Before they finished she ran off after Helen and Jeffrey. Just as she came up to them she heard Jeffrey say commandingly:

"Hurry up! Get your coat. I'll get the car. Cut across the links and meet me at the fourth hole, right there by the road."

Marilyn stepped back in a shadow, and the moment he was gone, followed on after Helen.

She waited outside the dressing room for the other girl to come out. She trailed her across the links halfway to the fourth hole. Then she caught up with her.

"Listen here, now, Helen Stevens!" Marilyn said between her teeth, gripping her arms. "Where are you going?"

"What business is it of yours? Let go of my arms!"

"So much my business that I am not letting you go until you tell me all about it."

Helen thrust her little quivering face under Marilyn's.

"I'll tell you, then. I'm going to

Atlantic City with him. What do you think of that?"

"Like the devil you are!" Marilyn retorted and shook her angrily.

Helen jerked one arm free, and swung it against Marilyn's neck. In an instant the two women, hothouse flowers of whatever priced civilization there may be, were in a wild tussle. Helen had the advantage of free limbs, but in Marilyn there was something—a depth of feeling and a savageness of serious desire which Helen would never know.

Marilyn literally trussed her up to the bench at the second tee and sped across the links.

Jeffrey was already waiting in his car. She tore the door open and gripped his hand in both of hers.

"My God, man, you can't do a thing like this to that kid!"

"Just where did you pop from, and what are you raving about?"

"I know all about it. You're not taking Helen to Atlantic City. I won't have it, do you understand? You would ruin that child for life."

"What a delicious fraud you are!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you'd make a marvelous substitute."

She drew herself back and up.

"I'll never be a substitute for anybody."

"Don't worry. You never will be." She took a step nearer to him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you can't catch a flying duck without a decoy."

"Which means—?"

"Just *you*! The Helens come as cheap as sparrows—but one has to work for the Marilyn!"

He leaped out of the car, picked her up bodily, and with no undue gentleness lifted her into it. The next moment he was behind the wheel and the car plunged forward.

"Where are you taking me?" she cried.

"To Atlantic City! Do you think I'm going to waste that suite I wired for?"

As they shot past the club somebody shouted wildly at them. She had a glimpse of two white legs beneath the leopard skin making a dive for a low-slung roadster. Helen had got loose. A tall fantastic Pierrot ran behind. It was Fuller.

Just before they rounded the bend, half a mile beyond the club, Marilyn turned and saw the powerful beams of Tom's headlights madly rocking behind them in pursuit.

THIS VIVID, DRAMATIC ROMANCE—REVEALING A JAZZ AGE GONE MAD  
WITH LUXURY—WILL BE CONTINUED IN THE JANUARY MUNSEY



## EROS

Nor all the gods are stern and grim,  
The gods of Erebus and Dis,  
And most am I afraid of him  
Whose poisoned arrow is a kiss.

Jove with his lightnings awes me not,  
Nor even Death with icy dart—  
But ah! that little god, whose lips  
Bring deathless anguish to the heart.

*Richard Le Gallienne*

# Is There a Santa Claus?

*A Famous Editorial. Originally Printed in the New York Sun, September 21, 1897*

## The Sun

WE take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of THE SUN:

"DEAR EDITOR—I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no SANTA CLAUS. Papa says 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.' Please tell me the truth, is there a SANTA CLAUS?"  
"115 West Ninety-Fifth Street."  
"VIRGINIA O'HANLON."

VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, VIRGINIA, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a SANTA CLAUS. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no SANTA CLAUS! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in SANTA CLAUS! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas eve to catch SANTA CLAUS, but even if they did not see SANTA CLAUS coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees SANTA CLAUS, but that is no sign that there is no SANTA CLAUS. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, VIRGINIA, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No SANTA CLAUS! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, VIRGINIA, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

# The Man Who Wrote "Is There a Santa Claus?"

By Harold M. Anderson



ON a September day in 1897 there came to the editor of the *Sun* a letter from a child just entering that period of life in which acute questionings assail minds hitherto satisfied to accept the authoritative but unexplained utterances of elders on the poetic things of life. It was an item in the day's grist of mail that comes to every newspaper. It phrased simply and directly the interrogatory which one day occurs to every normal youngster: Is there actually a benevolent dweller at the North Pole who annually brings gifts to well-behaved girls and boys?

Charles A. Dana, the famous editor of the *Sun*, lay dying at his home on Long Island. At his desk in the northwest corner of the red brick building at Nassau and Frankfort Streets which the *Sun* transformed from the council chamber of Tammany Hall to the Capitol of Newspaperdom, sat his lieutenant, Edward Page Mitchell, a poet in perception, gifted in understanding of what will touch the human heart. He read the juvenile inquiry; he comprehended the possibilities that lay in an adequate answer to that sincere request for help in a crucial passage of Time's inexorable instructional course. He decided that the *Sun* should answer the question, and to frame the reply he chose Francis Pharcellus Church.

Mitchell has told the story of that assignment in "Memoirs of an Editor." Church "bristled and pooh-poohed at the subject, but he took the

letter and turned with an air of resignation to his desk. In a short time he had produced the article"—the most famous, most widely circulated editorial article ever written, "Is There a Santa Claus?"

Twenty-nine years after "Is There a Santa Claus?" was published, the *Sun* was asked to tell something of its author beyond his name, and in that newspaper's leading article of December 23, 1926, the biographical data were set forth. Church was born in Rochester, New York, February 22, 1839, was graduated with honors from Columbia University twenty years later, read law, abandoned it to write, became editor of the *Galaxy Magazine*, was associated with his elder brother, Colonel William C. Church, in the management of the *Army and Navy Journal*, and for thirty-five years, until his death in New York on April 11, 1906, was an editorial writer on the *Sun*, being for the last four years of his service Mitchell's alternate in the editorship.

A finger under the ordinary stature, a fine head well poised on shoulders carried a bit forward, a body clad with attention to the fashion but a conservative step behind the dandy; lips hidden by a mustache, a well-defined nose, eyes set properly apart, a good brow topped by gray hair—this was the figure of Church. It was quickened by a personality intellectually made manifest in intelligent curiosity, disciplined sophistication, orderly craftsmanship.

Spiritually that personality respond-



ed to the more delicate vibrations of existence. Church was a religious man. His God was not an aloof creation of metaphysical research, but an embracing presence to be taken into account in the day's doings as a reasoning entity—an entity not to be offended by free discussion of such topics as creedal interpretations fine spun in theologians' labored declarations. He was a man of mettle, who, convinced that he was right, could summon pugnacity, persistence, and ingenuity to his side in controversy; a man of honor, to whom high-mindedness, independence, integrity, good taste were inheritances woven into the nature which Destiny tailored for his daily wear. When Church spoke the word "lady," the listener knew it was not misplaced.

Of imagination and wit he possessed liberal endowment. He drew from the granary of statistics streams of nourishing fact made acceptable for general consumption, for forcible feeding of reluctant or antagonistic mentalities, by his clarifying simplicity of exposition. He wrote in becoming style for the *Sun* on all subjects save one. That was politics. He could and did sustain and support principles, but he could not conceal, did not try to conceal, his aversion for the pollutions of patriotism that an inattentive electorate so often tolerates.

He was the child of loyalty to standards, to duty, to friends. With what burning indignation did Church repel the slander that threatened the deserved fame of that truly great New Yorker, Andrew H. Green, when a crazed murderer killed that good man! The town was stupefied with amazement at the scandal that was opened when the Father of Greater New York was shot at his own doorstep. A pillar of respectability, a treasured benefactor of the community, was painted in a pose as ridiculous as it was repulsive. The evil smirked, the weak wagged their doubting heads, the cynics parroted their "I told you so!" To all

of these Frank Church opposed his never shaken "This cannot be! It is not!"

His intuitive faith, his unwavering confidence, was justified. The man he defended was innocent, the victim of a tragic misidentification as astonishing as the fancy of the most venturesome fabricator of mystery tales dares trace; but months passed before the truth came to public knowledge, and during those months Frank Church never for an instant harbored doubt of his friend's purity of life, or temporized in testifying to his faith.

This was the author of "Is There a Santa Claus?" The success of the article was instant; its quality was celebrated before the *Sun* of September 21, 1897, in which it was originally printed, went to press. Carr Van Anda, then night editor of the *Sun*, now managing editor of the *New York Times*, in putting the editorial page together, read the article in proof and proclaimed its extraordinary character. The demand for it compels the *Sun* to keep copies in store for applicants who write or visit the office in person. Newspapers in all parts of the world reproduce it annually; commercial printers lavish on it in beautiful reproduction the adornments of their art; merchants use it in their advertisements; and the demand for prints increases with the years.

Frank M. O'Brien, in "The Story of the *Sun*," records the highest compliment the newspaper could bestow on an editorial writer—a compliment revealing the article's established place in literature. Church lived ten years after composing this classic, and on his death the *Sun* disclosed his name as that of its author, violating the rigid rule of anonymity enforced in the editor's office and never before broken.

Church's simplicity of nature, his sympathetic disposition, his mastery of craftsmanship, his rare insight, are immortalized in "Is There a Santa Claus?"

# One Kind Deed

By E. K. Means



AN' HE SAID JES' DIS:  
"OH, MY BOY! MY  
BABY BOY!"



THINK us Big Fo' ought to organize a deeds-of-kindness campaign," the Rev. Vinegar Atts announced one day, as he sat at ease in the rear of the popular negro hang-out called the Henscratch. "We hab spent a heap of time givin' advice, but now we ought to make a change, an' do a little good."

"You keep dat sort of talk ontill nex' Sunday an' say it at de Shoofly Church, an' you kin pass de hat an' git some money fer it," Pap Curtain snarled, with his yellow monkey face drawn in lines of complete disapproval. "But me—it don't listen to me wuth a cent. I won't chip in!"

"Did you ever do a kind deed in yo' life, Pap?" Vinegar asked.

"Ef I did, it wus a mistake, an' I never knowed it," Pap replied with emphasis. "Eve'y man in dis worl' is out to git his'n, an' he takes it when-

*A Tale of old Tickfall—The Rev. Vinegar Atts's campaign for deeds of kindness unexpectedly reacts upon himself*



ever he feels like he kin git away wid it widout gittin' in a lawsuit wid de cotehouse. Fer a feller to stop in de middle of all dis here grabbin' an' git to hook on a couple of kind acts—gosh! Whut good do it do?"

"Yes, but you don't onderstan'," Vinegar said. "Doin' good is a real job. To me, folks act like it's nothin' mo' to dem dan gwine out in a field an' pickin' a handful of daisies to put on somebody's grave, or somepin like dat; but charity is a whale of a stunt, an' 'tain't easy fer nobody to do a kind deed. You gotter sackafize, an' pick up yo' cross, an' all."

"Mebbe so," Pap said indifferently. "I confess I ain't never had no exp'unce or trainin' as a angel of mussy. I ain't de right color fer de job. Who ever heard tell of a black angel of mussy?"

"Most of de charity I ever done I got pussuaded into by some smilin' cuss who slaps me on de shoulder an' gits me to contribute to some po' widder who wants to bury her husbunt decent. It always gibs me pleasure to donate an' assist in de cemeteryin' of a nigger; but de niggers I would be most willin' to bury ain't dead yit," Skeeter Butts remarked.

"Supposin' we try to puffawm a kind deed, who's gwine benefit by it?" Figger Bush asked.

"Dat's de p'int," Skeeter agreed. "Who we gwine he'p?"

"Well, I hab dis notion in my mind," Vinegar replied. "De Holy Bible say, 'Ef yo' enemy hongre, feed him; ef he thirst, gib him a drink.' Now I figger wid dem advices it ought to be powerful easy to pick out somebody to he'p. All we got to do is to choose a enemy."

"Which enemy?" Skeeter Butts demanded. "My enemies is numbered by thousands. It's easier fer me to pick a friend who has need of somepin dan to pick out a enemy. My enemies would make a army mighty nigh as big as de World War, an' all of 'em would jes' love to bust a cap under my shirt. Dey hates me, an' I shore hates 'em back!"

"I's got as many enemies as Skeeter has, an' mo', because I's got de age on Skeeter," Pap Curtain remarked sadly. "I think I's even got a few mo' dan anybody else. Now do de Bible specify how to pick out which enemy to he'p?"

"Choose de one you hate de wusst," suggested Figger Bush.

"Dat's a pretty good way to decide," Vinegar agreed. "Pick out de one you would like to drown in a mud puddle, ef you could."

"How does you git at dat?" Pap snarled. "Git 'em all together an' ax de one who hates you de most to step fo'th an' git a kind deed done to him? He might misonderstan' an' shoot fust! Or does you ax all de yuther enemies to vote on who shall git kind-deeded fust?"

"Lawd, dat's a real good notion," Skeeter laughed. "Only it ought to be wucked de yuther way aroun'. I move dat us Big Four all take a vote on de enemy dat we done hate de wusst!"

"I am in favor of dat," Vinegar said eagerly. "We will pass aroun' some paper, an' each one of us will write one name on it. Ef any two of us agrees on a man, dat's de feller dat will git kind-deeded by us."

The four men solemnly took some scraps of paper, and after a moment's thought each scribbled a name. They placed the papers together, with the writing turned down, upon the table, and Vinegar Atts, at their suggestion, turned over each ballot and read the names aloud. The vote was unanimous. Every paper bore the name of Fiddle Funk.

The Big Four uttered a low whistle of surprise.

"Lawd hab mussy!" Pap Curtain sighed.

## II

THE name that all four men had written was that of the most prominent and prosperous colored citizen of Tickfall. Years ago Fiddle Funk had come into the community an unknown character, clothed in rags, and for awhile he had lived by beggary from door to door. He had had almost no association with the people of his race and color; but by some method he had acquired a little land, and year by year he had added to his possessions until Colonel Tom Gaitskill, in a public speech, had recently declared that Funk was the wealthiest, the most industrious, the most respectable, and the most

respected negro in the whole of Tick-fall Parish.

The opinion of the president of the First National Bank carried great weight; and yet, by unanimous and secret ballot, the Big Four had proclaimed Fiddle Funk as the man they hated most!

"How come we-all hit de bull's-eye at de fust shot?" Skeeter demanded. "Whut did Fiddle Funk ever do to you fellers?"

"All he ever done to me wus to be so stiff in de neck dat he never could turn his head an' see me," Pap Curtain declared.

"He said I wus too fat," Vinegar announced. "I hab always been proud of my manly figger. I got to hab a big stomick as a bellows, so I kin hold de wind to do my preachin' wid which; an' I likes to be reg'lar at my meals an' eat frequent and copious. Dat Fiddle Funk scandalized my figger an' my fawm!"

"When Fiddle wus runnin' a little sto', I swiped a apple off'n his stand one day, when I wus a little pickaninny, an' I run. He saw me take it, an' he throwed a orange at me. I done had a heap of practice playin' baseball, so I squat an' caught de orange an' run on wid bofe of 'em. Dat's why I hates him," Figger Bush contributed. "I don't know how come it is, but you always jes' nachelly hate a feller dat you ain't done right by."

"I wus always kind of stand-offish wid him, because he seemed to hab all de good luck dar wus," Skeeter said. "Now, wid me, ef dar warn't no bad luck, I wouldn't hab no luck at all; but nothin' ever did go wrong wid dat coon. Furdermo', I always mos' positively believed dat I wus Tickfall's leadin'est cullud citizen, an' den Kunnel Tom Gaitskill bust my balloom by namin' dis here Fiddle Funk in a speech to de white folks. Huh! Decoration Day won't never be a real success ontill I kin decorate Fiddle Funk's grave!"

"De question befo' de house is not whut Fiddle Funk done, but whut we's gwine to do," Vinegar Atts suggested. "We done picked our enemy; now how is we gwine to do him a good deed?"

"We cain't feed him," Skeeter laughed. "He ain't hongry."

"We cain't gib him no drink," Pap Curtain snarled. "Dat's another thing dat ails prohibition—you cain't he'p yo' enemies."

"Dat nigger is well fixed, an' ain't got need of nothin'," Vinegar said in a perplexed tone. "He is our wealthiest, leadingest, popularest citizen, an' it has got me stumped complete; but we muss think up some way to bestow our blessin' upon him."

"Shore!" Skeeter agreed. "It would be a hard blow to us ef we find dat our fust kind deed is a dud."

For a long time the four men sat in thoughtful silence. Up to that moment they had always supposed that it was the simplest thing in the world to do a kind act; but three-fourths of the Big Four had never tried it, and Vinegar was compelled to confess that his efforts in the past had never been very successful. It was particularly difficult to find something that would fit a man who had seemed to realize every ambition, and was now able to gratify every wish.

"Look here, fellers!" Skeeter said suddenly. "I never knowed any man in my life, however rich he might be, to hab everything he wanted. Dar's always somepin he wants an' cain't git, an' I bet it's dat same way wid Fiddle Funk."

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted. "I knows one thing Fiddle wanted an' didn't git. When he cracked dat humorous joke about me bein' too fat, I seen a chance to git back at him in a little way, an' I done it. It ain't never done me de littlest bit of good, because I don't believe in luck charms. I believes in Proverdunce; but I am got somepin dat Fiddle Funk wants."



"Whut is dat?" Figger Bush asked eagerly.

"Nothin' but a tarrapin toe," replied Vinegar.

### III

THE three men stared at Vinegar, waiting for further details. He went on to explain.

"You remember when ol' Tucky Buzzard lived out dar in de Little Moccasin Swamp, in dat holler sycamo' tree?" he said. "Well, Tucky was a crazy ol' coon whut could charm snakes, an' tell forchines, an' call birds an' squorls down out of de tree, an' all dem funny things."

"Suttinly I remember dat ol' bat," Pap announced. "He used to march aroun' de streets to a tune dat he sung hisself: 'T-u, Tucky, T-u, Tie; T-u, Tucky Buzzard's eye!'"

"Yes, suh, dat's de very man," Vinegar continued. "Tucky had one lucky charm whut he wore aroun' his neck all his endurin' life. It wus de foot of a land tarrapin. Ol' Tucky believed dat all his life had been guided an' guarded by dat ole foot, an' he would ruther hab lost his life dan lose dat luck piece. He didn't gib it up until he gib up his life, neither."

"You didn't rob de dead, did you?" Figger Bush quacked.

"Naw—I robbed de livin'," Vinegar grinned. "About de time me an' Fiddle got stand-offish about dat mean joke on me bein' too fat, I heard dat he wus tryin' to pussuade ol' Tucky to leave him dat luck piece when he died. I used to go to see Tucky when I knowed he wus drawin' nigh to de end of de journey, so I beat Fiddle to dat ol' man an' axed him to gib me de luck charm to remember him by. He promised to do it, in de presence of witnesses; so when he died I tuck dat tarrapin foot off his neck in de presence of de same witnesses, an' fotch it home wid me."

"Does you wear it?" Figger inquired.

"Naw, suh!" Vinegar said emphatically. "I don't wear no dead man's toe aroun' my neck! I wouldn't tie dat luck charm to my hind leg wid a rope a mile long. I would be skeart it would drag me down whar ol' Tucky's at."

"You shore hit Fiddle a hard lick dat time," Pap laughed. "I remember about dat, now dat you mention it. Fiddle raved about it awful. He swore dat foot belonged to him, an' he ought to hab it. He said you tuck advantage of a po' ol' dyin' man who wus not in his right mind, an' got it off'n him by fraud."

"I's glad to hear you say dat," Skeeter remarked thoughtfully, "because dat tells us how to settle our problem at once."

"How come?" Vinegar inquired suspiciously.

"It is yo' Christyum duty to do a kind deed an' send dat luck charm to Fiddle in de name of de Big Fo', an' wid our compliments," Skeeter explained. "To me dat seems awful simple an' easy to onderstand."

"Whu-u-ut?" Vinegar growled. "It shore takes a simple mind to think up a thing like dat! Why, dat feller come to me once an' offered to buy dat toe off of me."

"Dat shows dat he wanted it bad," Skeeter argued. "It is de one thing he wants an' ain't got."

"Suttinly!" Vinegar howled. "But you don't git my viewp'int on dat. Dat tarrapin foot stands fer satisfaction. It is somepin dat a feller I dislikes wants an' cain't git, because de feller dat dislikes him owns it an' won't trade or gib it up."

"Well, dar you are," Pap said in a discouraged tone. "We's mighty nigh busted our beans tryin' to think up some way to kind-deed dat coon, an' now we done found de way, an' look how you cuts up!"

Vinegar sat staring at them, his mobile face wearing every expression of surprise, reproach, and indignation.

He had gloated for years over this one possession as indicating that he was in some respects no less shrewd and capable than Fiddle Funk; and now these men, who had always pretended to be his friends, were suggesting a course of conduct thoroughly repugnant to him. At that moment, if they had taken another vote on the matter of enemies, Vinegar would doubtless have inscribed the name of Skeeter Butts on his ballot.

Skeeter saw that he had caught a bear in his trap, and he began to maul him around with great joy.

"Git a straight line on yo'se'f, revun," he said. "Whut started dis notion, anyhow? Who argufied to us at de fust off-startin' about scatterin' a few deeds of kindness? An' now, when I p'int out right under yo' nose how you kin do somepin, you set dar an' glare at me like as if I had been tryin' to cut de lef' hind tail off'n yo' long-tail preachin' coat. Whut kind of a angel of mussy is you? You look to me like a fallen angel who fell off de ladder. You bent yo' halo, an' bust a wing, an' got all yo' tail feathers mashed by de fack dat dat wus whar you hit when you landed from yo' fall!"

"I ain't no angel," Vinegar growled. "I'm jes' one of de garden variety of nigger preachers, an' dey ain't angels or saints or nothin' like dat—fur from it!"

"We agrees wid you on dat," Skeeter said heartily. "You ain't makin' such a proud show of yo'se'f now, atter all you' talk about sackafize an' pickin' up de double cross; but it 'pears to me like you done precipitate yo'se'f in dis predicamint, an' you's gittin' a angel stunt forced on you."

"All right!" Vinegar sighed. "But I want you to know dat I'm doin' dis under protest an' by compellent, and ain't in favor of it a-tall!"

"Oh, de Big Fo' always ack as a committee of de whole," Pap said. "We's all behind you in dis; an' meb-

be we'll find out dat Fiddle has some good p'int's atter all. Mebbe he's one of dese here angel unawares dat de Bible mentions. Pussonly, I desires to know how a feller will ack when he gits somepin dat he wants real bad, an' gits it from a feller whut hates him real hard."

"Mebbe Fiddle has some good p'int's, an' mebbe I has some, too," Vinegar said, his mouth drooping at the corners as if he was nearly ready to weep. His usually cheerful face looked really pathetic.

"Of co'se, you hab yo' good points," Skeeter said cheerfully; "but you don't force 'em on folks. We hab to git together an' force you to force 'em. Ain't dat awful? You hadn't oughter be so modest an' retirin' an' meek an' humble. Put some snap in yo' sackafize!"

Vinegar took an envelope out of his pocket and tore it into four pieces. He handed a scrap to each of the three men and kept one for himself.

"Now, us will take another vote," he suggested.

Pap Curtain slapped the top of the table with his big wool hat, and swept the paper to the floor.

"Whut is done did is did," he snarled; "an' you is de feller who has done did it!"

Vinegar rose and left them, a pathetic figure with his chin in his collar.

#### IV

LATER that afternoon Vinegar Atts returned to the Henscratch, carrying a little round pill box. He handed it to Skeeter, and said:

"I guess I got myself in fer somepin when I got to monkeyin' wid somepin whut is outside de lines of Big Fo' activities, Skeeter. I ain't had no use fer ole Fiddle Funk fer years, an' I hab always been hopin' dat somepin would bust his stiff neck or smash him up; an' now de one good jolt I ever give ol' Fiddle has got to be wucked up into a kind deed!"

"It do look like it played out kind of funny," Skeeter conceded; "but I don't see whar you hab to make such a awful sackafize. You say you don't need dat tarrapin foot, an' dat you never use it. You don't put any value by it, an' yit you ain't willin' to gib it away."

"Dat's right," Vinegar said. "In fack, I ain't gwine to gib it away. I am fotchin' dis here foot to you, an' layin' it down in yo' hand. You kin do wid it whut you please, an' I hope I will never see it or hear tell about it agin!"

Vinegar walked out of the house, feeling very much abused, and looking like a big, fat baby just tuning up to cry.

Skeeter looked after the preacher until he had disappeared. Then he called to Little Bit, and told his youthful assistant to get into the little automobile and carry that pill box out to Fiddle Funk.

"Tell him dat Vinegar Atts gib it to Skeeter Butts to send to Fiddle Funk," Skeeter instructed him. "Ef he ain't dar, jes' leave de little box wid somebody, an' he kin git it when he comes in."

"Dat don't look so much like kind-deedin' nobody when you jes' leave a ol' secondhan' tarrapin foot in a pill box at his place an' go away," Little Bit laughed. "Ef somebody done dat to me, I would figger dey wus aimin' to hoodoo me!"

The four men met again that evening, and sat around wondering what to do next. It is a significant fact that there was no further suggestion of kind deeds that might be performed in the community. That seemed to be a subject in which they had completely lost their interest.

And then who should show up at the Henscratch but Fiddle Funk? He looked around him curiously, for he had never been in the place before. The Big Four looked at him just as curiously, for they had never dreamed that

he would ever come near their shabby hang-out.

Then Funk came over to where they were sitting. He seemed to be laboring under some deep emotion and trying to control it. He unwrapped the little pill box from his handkerchief and placed it upon the table. Then he removed the top of the box and gazed with an air of reverence at a withered, shriveled foot, shrunken with age until it was not much larger than a postage stamp. Through a hole in the center of the foot there was drawn a small deerskin thong, soft and round from the wear of many years next to human flesh.

This was the much coveted terrapin toe.

"I had give up all hope of ever git-tin' dis," Fiddle said.

"Is dat so?" Skeeter remarked non-committally.

"An' now Little Bit tells me dat it wus sont to me by de Big Four, wid de special compliments of de Revun Vinegar Atts," Fiddle went on.

"Yes, suh, we passed it on," Pap informed him.

Fiddle looked at the foot a long time, and then raised it from the box with reverent fingers. The men, watching closely, noticed that his eyes assumed the peculiar shadowy look of one who is gazing backward through the dim corridors of memory. His face took on an expression of infinite sadness, and he sighed deeply two or three times. Then he began to talk in a slow, gentle voice.

"I ain't able to thank you brudders fer a act of kindness whut means mo' to me dan anything else in de world. You don't know how delighted an' proud I is to git dis here foot!"

"You don't got to thank us," Vinegar said harshly. "You is got whut you want, an' you ought to be satisfied wid dat. You better leave de gift be, an' not punch aroun' too much about how come you got it give to you."

"Naw, suh! I got to thank some-

body fer dis gift. You know I tried to buy it off of you once."

"It don't cost you a cent," Vinegar assured him. "It's yourn because you want it, an' dat's all. Three-fourths of dem whut sont it to you is glad you got it; an' dat's as fur as any of us wants to go in de matter."

"I wonder ef you would like to know why I wants it so bad?" Fiddle asked.

"Shore would!" Figger Bush answered readily. "I'm got a inquirin' mind, an' I always craves to know things."

"Ol' Tucky Buzzard wus de best friend I ever had," Fiddle began.

"But dat ol' man wus a loon'tick!" Vinegar protested, with a gasp of astonishment. "He didn't never know whut end of hisself he wus standin' on."

"Suttinly!" agreed Fiddle, smiling. "You see I ain't never had many friends of no kind, an' a lonely feller like me has to take whut he kin git. My best friend wus a nut."

The men stared at him in silence. Fiddle paused a moment to collect his thoughts.

"You see," he continued, "I hab been pretty much alone all de endurin' years of my life. When I wus a little feller, my maw died, an' me an' paw lived by ourselves in a little cabin on de Mississippi River. De water riz high one year, an' de levee broke. De water come into de cabin, an' me an' paw clumb up on de roof. We waited all night fer somebody to come an' git us, an' den, jes' about daylight, de cabin riz up an' commence to float away. I wus little, an' I wus sleepy, an' de cabin wobbled a good deal, an' I spilt off. I couldn't git back to de cabin roof, but I swum to a tree limb. I sot on dat limb till somebody come an' rescued me; but paw floated off, an' nobody ever heard tell of him agin."

"Lawd! Lawd!" Vinegar howled, his voice almost a sob.

"I wandered aroun' until I growed up, an' I had a hard time to git a start. I never did git to goin' good ontill I landed in dis place, an' Kunnel Tom Gaitskill, de friend of all niggers, loant me a helpin' hand. I got to feelin' like I wus de only livin' member of my fambly, an' I ought to amount to somepin, because dar warn't nobody to be somebody but me; so I cut out all nigger foolishness an' wucked—Lawd, how I did wuck!"

"You been hittin' it powerful hard," Skeeter said. "We tuck notice."

"Thank you," replied Fiddle gratefully. "I had a notion dat you cullud folks never did care fer me, but I'm shore it wus because you didn't onderstan' how it wus. Well, one day I wus walkin' out in de swamp, an' I met a ol' crazy nigger named Tucky Buzzard. He didn't hab no memory an' no mind. He played wid snakes an' birds, an' lived on roots an' berries, an' eve'ybody wus skeart of him; but I hung aroun' him, because I wus pretty lonesome, an' nobody else paid me no mind. I took him to my house an' fed him real vittles, an' we got to be good friends. He wus skeart of nearly eve'ybody, because dey acted like dey wus skeart of him, an' he couldn't git it in his cracked head how come de chillun would run from him; but he trusted me. Den one day, when I give him one of my old shirts to wear, he changed his shirt right dar in my room, an' I saw around his neck a tarrapin toe on de end of a deerskin string. I jumped up an' axed him whar he got it."

Fiddle ceased speaking, and sat for awhile looking thoughtfully at the shriveled foot of the land terrapin. The men sat in silent and breathless attention. Fiddle picked up the foot and placed it against the side of his face, like a caress.

"When I axed him dat question," he continued, "de ol' man sot down on de flo' an' commence to rock from side to side an' forward an' backward, an' howled jes' like a swamp panther, an'



he said jes' dis: 'Oh, my boy! My baby boy!' Den he couldn't remember nothin' else, an' didn't do nothin' but cry an' howl."

"Lawd Gawd hab mussy on us all!" Vinegar Atts sobbed. "I see whut's a comin'!"

"Now, brudders, when I wus a little boy, an' jes' befo' de big water riz to wash us away, I caught a tarrapin, an' paw cut off his toe an' put it aroun' his neck fer a luck charm. I remembered dat tarrapin foot an' dat deerskin string, an' I knowed I had found my paw. He never knew me, an' he never would live nowhar but in de woods; but now I'm got de only thing whut binds me to de past, for dis here foot is all dat come out of dat Mississippi River flood excep' me. I thanks you cullud men from de bottom of my heart!"

Fiddle stood up, placed the terrapin foot in the little box, carefully wrapped the box in a bandanna handkerchief, and put it into his pocket. The four

men watched him, their eyes filled with tears.

"An' now I invites all of you to come out to my house to dinner nex' Sunday," Fiddle said. "We're gwine to celebrate. I aims to hab everything in de world to eat!"

Not a man verbally accepted the invitation, for not one could trust his voice to speak; but Fiddle, with a smile of understanding, bowed and walked out.

When Funk had gone, the four men brushed their hands over their eyes, as if they were dazed. Every man busied himself in preparing something to smoke, feeling that he could get back to normal by the doing of old familiar things. Then Pap Curtain spoke his mind:

"Well, we put across a mighty kind deed, an' done some real good. It makes me feel pretty decent!"

"Shore!" Skeeter Butts agreed. "I move we force Vinegar Atts to do one kind deed eve'y day!"



## DECEMBER

I DREAMED of a patriarch, wrinkled and old,  
With eyes that were dimming and blood that was cold;

But I found you, a *Lochinvar* out of the West  
With the fame and the force of the year in your breast.

Gray-bearded and feeble—they pictured you so;  
Last leaf in the garden—and how could I know?

Nay, you set every pulse in my body athrill,  
Spur lagging ambition, goad loitering will!

December, the artists your shoulders have bowed  
To make you a grandfather senile and cowed;

Yet each I refute to emblazon the truth—  
Bold comrade, gay friend, you are young in my youth!

L. Mitchell Thornton

# Whoopee!!!

By Brooke Hanlon



*In Louis XV's day it was "After me, the deluge!"—The modernized version of the Lockharts was "Jazz, liquor, and installment payments!"*



HE room tilted gently. It inclined at an angle of about forty-five degrees, but the furniture, miraculously, failed to toboggan down the shining length of floor.

Marge Lockhart blinked in surprise. Even the davenport upon which she was perched stuck grotesquely in position, flat against the higher wall. That was curious. She felt an impulse to lean over and see what was holding it there, and she followed the impulse, lowering her clipped head slowly, slowly—

The room righted itself at that, began whirling madly like a county fair merry-go-round. Marge recovered the perpendicular with a scrambling effort, and clutched the—what was it?—flank of her galloping steed.

No, it wasn't a steed. She winked several times. It was the davenport arm, the taupe velvet arm of the davenport

she and Tom had bought soon after they were married. She patted it affectionately. Then that music wasn't merry-go-round music at all. It was the radio.

She stared across at the radio. It clung to the wall, too. Ah, they had good furniture. That radio, too—payments due on it. A payment due—when was it? She wrinkled her nose.

But it was impossible to think in a house that persisted in spinning. Marge closed her eyes, leaned her head back and rode. When she opened them again it was to find the ceiling playing pranks. It was sliding up and down, stopping just short of her head on each downward trip. Queer. One of the reasons they'd taken this place, she and Tom, was because of the beamed ceiling. They hadn't guessed it would behave in this fashion, especially when they had guests. Marge frowned at it.

It was time for her to say something, no doubt.

"Who was this Newton?" she called above the din.

"Marge wants to know who this Newton was." Peg's giggle rose hilariously and Janet's joined it.

"She's talking about strange men, Tom," Ruthie Boyd warned in her husky voice. "These 're nice g-green g-glass gin g-goblets, Marge," she remarked. "You go listen to 'er, Tom. Might hear things. Say, Marge, where'd you get these g-gorgeous g-green glass gin—g-g-goblets?" she giggled.

The party was nearly over.

"I'll tell you who thith Newton wath, lil girl." Binkie Boyd came and sat beside her. "He wath a motion picture actreth, thee. He wath a thinema thtar, a thelluloid thelebrity. He thtarred in—"

"Move over." Hammy Starr lounged toward them, balancing a glass which tinkled merrily as he tilted it this way and that. One of Hammy's eyebrows was pasted high on his forehead. "I'll tell little Margie who this fella Newton was—"

He bent over her protectively, and Marge's eyes fell fascinated upon three bright drops that glistened on her skirt. Another pleaded dress for the cleaner. "Four fifty," she murmured sleepily.

"This fella Newton"—Hammy lowered his voice confidentially—"he was two Irishmen working in the Hudson vehicular tunnel, see. One was Pat and one was Mike—"

"You two birds get away from my wife!"

The voice was sharp, ugly. Marge raised her eyes. There was Tom with his face red, swimming about under the chandelier.

"Look here, Marge—"

It was coming. He was going to bawl her out again in front of them all, this curious fish.

"—If you want to play around with other men—" The fish's eloquence, the sort it sold electric refrigerators with, got going—"I just wish you'd

kindly pick a time when I'm not here to look on and be made a fool of. Look here—"

The fish had an ugly snarl about its mouth. "Oh, Tom—" Marge reached out to it.

"You knew both these birds before you married me. They were both in the field long before I was. Yes, and no doubt you—"

"Oh, Tom—stop. Your mouth looks so—"

But he wouldn't be stopped. He went on and on, and Peg's and Janet's eyes got brighter and brighter, listening.

"I'm about tired of it, that's all. If you can't take a little drink without flirting with all the men on the party—"

"Tommy, I—"

"Th-yut up, Tom," Binkie advised negligently.

"Get a drink, Tom," Hammy brayed from the other side of the room where he was now waving his arms about, flail-like, in front of the radio, under the impression that he was leading an orchestra. He burst into song:

"They worked in the vehicular tube,  
They toiled in the vehicular tube,  
They worked in the vehic-hic-hic-hic-hic—  
Vehicular tube."

Binkie joined him, and Charlie Jacobs. The room rang and rocked with their hic-hic-hics. Tom was staring sullenly, unable now to make himself heard. With a sudden movement he reached over and switched off the radio.

"You can all go home," he said with dignity, "and I don't care how soon you go, either. Coming in here, making love to my wife! Get your things. Get their things, Marge."

"Don't mind him," Marge begged. "Don't listen to him. Everybody—have another drink."

But they were putting their coats on, still chanting.

"'Night, Marge," they said.

"'Night, Tom. Thleep it off, old man."

Marge gazed, her eyes owlshly wide open. "I'm the hostess," she remembered. Her guests seemed to be dipping and diving crazily, crowding toward the door.

"Marge—" Ruthie Boyd leaned against Binkie and tilted her glass for a final drink. "Where's you get these jolly lil gin joblets, Marge?" she inquired sleepily.

*Crash!*

Marge stared now at wreckage on the floor. Aunt Grace's birthday set broken.

"Whoop-ee!"

Binkie's voice floated back from the drive. It was the latest Broadway slang for "raising Cain."

"Whoopee!"

Charlie's pæan rose above the roar of his motor.

They were gone. Marge watched Tom stalk out of the room, saw his elbow strike a glass on the piano, knock it over—heard his step, military, deliberate, on the stairs.

It was wonderful how Tom could walk in this pitching house. She smiled admiringly, watching a liquid trickle down the side of the baby grand, her father's wedding present and her most cherished possession. Perhaps he'd been a sailor, Tom. That was an idea. "I must—wash that off—" Her eyes closed.

"I must wash—" She drew her feet up. "—that off." She slept.

## II

It was daylight. The sun was streaming in around the edges of the drawn shades, but the wall lamps were still burning, a sickly yellow. A floor and a bridge lamp glimmered under shades tilted jauntily to one side.

"Oh, dear—" Marge got to her feet, one hand clutching her head, and clicked the electric light buttons. She looked at her watch; it had stopped at four. The room was close, and a sick-

ening odor hung over it. All night without any air. This head—

She dragged up the stairs, and at every step her brain thumped. It looked late. Suppose Tom had neglected to set the alarm again?

He was lying across the bed in his clothes, and that stifling closeness was in the bedroom, too. The alarm clock said eight ten. He'd be late again, the second time in a week!

"Tom, Tom—" She called him, mixed an effervescent drink in the bathroom and downed it, opened the windows. "Oh, Tom—" She had him awake at last. "You forgot the alarm."

"Damn!" He sat up and stared unbelievably at the clock.

There was hurrying then, confusion. She made oatmeal, only to discover that they'd forgotten to put out the milk and cream bottles. The last of the oranges were squeezed pulps among a litter of empty bottles in the sink.

A ginger ale bottle had got crushed back against the egg bag and Marge fished it out gingerly, put in an exploring hand. Five were broken, one was whole. She dropped the whole one into water. Tom would have to be satisfied with one egg, canned milk in his coffee.

Oh, if only he hadn't forgotten the alarm—if only that sharp pain would go away from the back of her neck!

Slipping bread into the toaster, Tom's wife had a sudden memory flash. She hurried into the living room and put up the shades. The tinkle of the precious Venetian glass Aunt Grace had sent, sounded under her feet, and there was a sticky stain on one of the rugs, but Marge had no eyes for these calamities. She turned slowly toward the piano. There it was, an upset glass and a pool of white spilling over and running down the rich dark surface of her baby grand.

Tom found her crying on the bench.

"What's up, kid?"



He slipped an arm about her. Tom was always contrite after times like last night when he'd made a fool of himself. A little worried, too, this morning. What would old Grimes at the office say?

Marge pointed to the stain. "It won't come off." Her voice was choked. "The—the finish is gone." She followed her husband into the kitchen. "It's ruined, Tom."

"Don't cry," he said inadequately. "So's the toast."

He took two charred remnants out of the toaster and carried them to the breakfast inglenook.

"There's an egg," Marge remembered. Her tears kept coming.

There was an egg. It was hard boiled, but Tom ate it philosophically. Marge watched him go down the walk. She could read a worry in the thoughtful slump of his shoulders. What would old Grimes say? Then she heard him whistle determinedly and saw his shoulders straighten. Well, what of it?—this meant. You had to keep up with the crowd. She returned his wave.

### III

SHE had a bad morning. You'd never believe that a party of eight adults could get a house into that condition. Never, that is, unless you'd had to clean up after them. Mrs. Maligan came twice a week, but Marge and Tom were always careful not to throw a party on the night before she was due. Marge could never have borne her clear-eyed scrutiny on all this.

She rounded up sticky glasses, aired the house, and washed interminable dishes on which the lunch of the night before had hardened. She wondered absently several times what would be done to children at a party who hid sandwiches away among the phonograph records or in the magazine rack. She carried the bottles down cellar; each was good for a nickel refund.

At eleven the mail came. Marge looked at the amount of it in surprise and then remembered the date. It was the first of the month.

She opened envelopes with little, glazed, front windows, and the ache in her head grew sharper. Baum & Blum were getting nasty about the balance due on her silver fox. The radio notice was there, also the slip from the credit company that had financed the roadster.

Three months' milk and cream and butter bill! The light and gas had gone over a month, too.

Good heavens, why hadn't Tom given her the money for those last month? They looked staggering now. She frowned, remembering why Tom hadn't. It was just at the first of last month that he'd got an opportunity to pool in on that cache of Holland gin. Holland gin!—the vile stuff that had taken the finish off her piano. Well, the last of Tom's share was gone now. It had lasted just a month. Fifty dollars a month for gin.

She sat up straight suddenly, and the bills slid from her lap. Fifty dollars, in one month! That had been an extra, too. Tom had paid his share in the other parties the crowd had had.

And the bills hung on. They got into these fearful jams. Marge gathered the envelopes into a packet and looked down at them with a childishly frightened look. They were getting in deeper and deeper, she and Tom. Perhaps she didn't manage right. How did the others do it? she wondered. Jan and Peg and Ruthie. Binkie and Hammy had been classmates of Tom's. Charlie Jacobs wasn't more than two years older. Did they make so much more?

The others bought just as much of the stuff as they did, she assured herself, frowning. Binkie and Ruth were the best sports of all. They threw hilarious parties, and were continually having visitors from up-State, where their homes had been, for week-ends.

Jan and Charlie weren't slackers, either. They were in the foursome which bought Dr. Gregg's entire book of prescription blanks each quarter and reserved the Triangle Drug's supply of rye in advance.

Peg—Marge had seen Peg ruin an eighty-nine-dollar dress one evening, and giggle. Some one was always breaking the beveled glass in their French doors, too. They never—what was it Tom said—squawked.

The phone rang then and it was Janet.

"How are you, Marge?"

"Fine. How are you, Jan?"

"Just great. 'Fess up, now — bet you have a headache."

"I do, a little, Jan."

"That gin of Tom's was great stuff." Janet giggled reminiscently.

"Yes—" Marge answered the obligation to giggle in return, but hers was a feeble gayety. "It was great while it lasted."

"We had a peach of a time," Janet said amiably. "What I wanted to tell you, Marge. Charlie and Bink had a little collision last night. Bink's car is pretty badly done in and Charlie's going to pay half. I think that's fair, don't you? Charlie thinks he'll get off with a hundred."

"That's too bad, Jan. Yes, that's fair enough. How'd it happen?"

"Well, to tell you the truth—" Janet's laughter was a gust of delight. "I think they were both a little bit tight."

It was the cue. They both snickered wordlessly for a minute.

"Whoopee, Marge!"

"Whoopee, Jan!"

Marge turned slowly away from the phone.

"They *do* manage better," she thought enviously. "She said a hundred dollars—and laughed! Tom and I couldn't laugh if we had to pay a hundred just now. It might just as easily have been our car, too."

Gathering the scattered bills and

putting them away in the desk, Mrs. Lockhart called the cleaner to send for her dress and the tailor for Tom's suit.

All that day she went about with a little pucker between her eyes. When she'd succeeded in getting her mind off the light bill, the gas bill slipped into her consciousness, impishly; when she'd wrenched it away from the gas bill, the everlasting overdue payments on radio, car, silver fox, *et cetera*, intruded.

It was hard to go down to the market; they hadn't given Reem's anything for so long. Marge telephoned her order.

"I'll talk to Tom," she decided.

But the pucker didn't go away. It was hard to talk to Tom about liquor. He always accused one of nagging.

#### IV

"HELLO, Tom!"

"Hello, hon!" He came in pink and ruddy, kissed her, drew a creamy wrapped box from under his arm.

"Oh, Tom—" She read the label. "You shouldn't have bought such expensive candy."

"That's all right." He went a deeper color. No one hated his jealousy exhibitions more than Tom—after they were over. "Zoop ready?"

"Yeah. I've got stuffed eggplant."

She decided to let the bills wait until after dinner. The lecture, too. Tom was so sweet in this contrite mood. He helped her wash up, scouring the pans energetically.

"Tom—" She sat on the arm of his chair later and smoothed the stubborn twist in his hair. "The bills came. We'd better do some figuring."

They did it, or rather she did it, and he looked on, rather bored.

"Look here, Marge," he interpolated lazily from time to time, "it can't be that bad."

"It is." She frowned, intent on her column. "The way I figure it, if we live as close as moles this month we'll be able to give them all something."

Marge looked so flushed and disheveled, sitting there, that her husband felt constrained to pull her down on his knee and administer a couple of kisses. The sheet stating their financial rating he caught between a thumb and finger and sent it volplaning across the room.

"Be serious, Tom," she begged. "I'll get the book and you make out the checks."

"What's the use," he teased, "when there's no money in the bank."

"But, Tom, two days after you were paid—"

"Look here." He grinned and drew a flat small book from his pocket—Dr. Gregg's prescription book. "Did you forget it was my turn?"

"Oh, Tom." She edged away from him as if it were a bomb he held. "You didn't—"

Something came up in her throat, she wasn't sure but that it was a sob.

"I had to." He was self-righteous. "It was my turn."

"They'll take the r-radio." Her premonition had been right—it was a sob. "A p-payment is due on the roadster. Baum & Blum will send a man out. I'm ashamed to go into the market. We need coal, and I can't call the White Company without paying something on the last. They'll take—"

"What do you expect me to do?" Tom turned sulky. He thought for a moment. "Call another coal company," he suggested. "Let the rent go for a month."

"We've never done that." Another sob took Marge unawares. "It seems so—cheap."

"Letting your friends down seems cheap, too," he reminded her. "When it was Bink's turn he bought the scrips, and when it was Charlie's turn he bought 'em. I had to. See."

"But, Tom, what about the bills? Last month it was fifty dollars for gin—"

"There you go, nagging." He walked up and down, running his fin-

gers through his hair. "You don't like gin, do you? No, it's poison to you. Oh, crimes—" He rushed into the kitchen.

"W-what are you doing?" She followed, to see him cracking ice, turning lemons on the little patented device, letting a colorless liquid gurgle out of a bottle.

"This needs a drink," he explained.

"Tom—stop." She put her hand out and took the bottle from him. "We aren't drinking any more," she said evenly. "We're stopping right now—to-night. We'll never have a drop in the house again."

"Marge!"

"I mean it. We can't afford it, and we're stopping. First it was an occasional party, and now it's three or four a week, with you running out here to mix something up every time we're home alone five minutes—"

"Good Lord, Marge!" He stared at her.

"I mean it, Tom."

"But—we can't let the crowd down that way, hon."

"We have to—or smash up, Tom. Can't you see it coming?"

She coaxed, and kissed the tip of his ear. She pleaded, and let her arms slip around his neck.

"Just a trial, Tommy. Let's give it a trial."

"All right," he assented at last, gloomily. "We'll be as lonesome as Crusoe, though."

"Just send that awful book around to Binkie—"

"All right." He groaned. "We'll sit home and read aloud to one another."

"But at least we'll be able to hold our heads up, dear."

"Those birds 'll think I'm not making out," Tom mourned. During the balance of the evening he did a lot of restless walking about, and several times got as far as the kitchen door.

"Those birds 'll think—" He'd stare at the refrigerator, swerve ab-

ruptly. "Look here, Marge," he warned once, "the gang's not to know what's back of all this."

## V

It was the longest week of the winter. Tom and Marge played honeymoon bridge, and got books out of the lending library. They sat in front of the fire, and were sleepy at ten o'clock. If only the telephone had kept quiet— But it buzzed continually. As often as possible Marge answered it. She didn't want Tom to hear the merrymaking at the other end.

"Come on over, Marge—" a cajoling voice would come to her ear, music and laughter back of it like a gay colored curtain. "Binkie and the gang just blew in. Listen—hear that? Come on, hop over—"

"That you, Marge?" it was, again. "Listen, the party's goin' great. What, you can't come? Now, listen, we're expectin' you, that's all. Tell Tom we're all waitin' up here for him to mix one o' those Tom Thumbs—"

Or— "That you, Tom? Say, drag yourself now— What's that? Cleaning the furnace? For the love of Pete—"

"We'll go in town to a movie," they decided one night, and came home yawning on the eleven twenty.

"Let's walk up past Binkie's—"

"No, Tom."

"No harm in walking past, is there?"

They walked past the Boyds' and a party was on. One of the side window curtains hadn't been drawn and Tom looked back. He caught a glimpse of Ruthie dancing, of Hammy waving his arms—

Marge dragged him on. They went home, and she played on the piano for ten minutes or so. The house seemed sepulchral and the milk bottles rattled mournfully when Tom put them out. They went to bed.

A week and three days— It was Saturday night. "Bink's on the phone,

Marge." There was a wistfulness in Tom's voice. "The Cleeks are down from Hartford, and Jerry Brandon and his girl are out from town. The rest of the gang, too. Bink says Sam Cleek brought down a suitcase full of champagne. They were in at the game. What 'll I tell him, Marge?"

She struggled. "You know, Tom."

"No?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't we go and not drink?"

"I don't know. Could we?"

"Cleek works for the construction king of Connecticut. If I made a contact there—" He paused.

"Jenny Cleek wears the most divine clothes— All—right, Tom. This once."

"Whoopee!" He caught her.

They came to life suddenly, then. They hurried about upstairs, bumping into one another and laughing. Their eyes shone and their tongues dipped in and out of an inexhaustible fund of chatter. "Only one drink each," they promised solemnly on the Boyd steps.

And then Tom was edging around to her, saying—"we'd better make it three drinks, Marge. After all, this isn't like rye, you know."

So they had three drinks and then rather lost count. At one forty-five Sam Cleek had Marge in a corner and was explaining his famous football feat, the one that saved the day for old alma mater back in 1922.

"Look here, Marge—" It was Tom, off again. At about this time on every party, as Hammy Starr said, Marge could have been paddling about alone in the middle of the Atlantic and Tom would have accused her of flirting with an aviator flying overhead. She managed to hush him up this time, however, and get him started home. "Whoopee!" The farewells of the crowd rang after them.

## VI

THEY didn't feel particularly good next morning. During a late breakfast



Tom eyed Marge warily from time to time, peeping over the top of the Sunday supplements.

"I forgot all about the jolly old resolutions last night." He drew the paper up as a shield.

"No wonder," she returned cryptically.

"Fact is"—his voice was unconcerned—"I must have been a little tight. I believe I—sort of passed the word around that the gang should all gather here to-morrow night."

"H-m!" Mrs. Lockhart's lips made a straight line, a feat they weren't adapted to in contour.

"Yes, I did, old lady. I must have been a little tight, all right. But it's a good thing, at that. The Cleeks are staying over, and Sam Cleek's a good man for me to know."

"H-m!" she repeated, more ominously.

"Say, Marge—" Tom rubbed the back of his head. "A man has a right to get some good out of his own book of scrips."

"But why didn't you tell me you had twenty-five dollars or so to squander on a party, Tom?" Her tone was worried. "I could have given it to Baum & Blum's man. He came yesterday in a—in a little Ford with 'Credit Department' lettered on it. Don't think the neighbors missed—"

"Crimes!" Tom rubbed the back of his head faster. "The fact is, I don't have it, Marge. But I can borrow. It'll be good business. S-Sam Cleek—"

He was looking at her now with an expression so nearly like that of a scared schoolboy up before the teacher that Marge relented. "All right, *one* more party." She went around the table to him and the Sunday paper emerged, somewhat crumpled.

## VII

It was when the Monday night party was at its height, and Marge was slicing sandwich bread somewhat er-

atically, that a sentence of Tom's caught her ear.

"Count me in," he was saying enthusiastically, and slapping Sam Cleek on the back.

Marge discarded an odd slice of bread which seemed to vary in thickness from one millimeter to two inches and listened again.

"The whole thing," Sam Cleek was talking, "will be a hundred and sixty. That lets you each off with forty dollars. It's absolutely pre-war. You won't get another chance like it in a lifetime. This old bird died up home, and his cellar was a thing of beauty and a joy forever, take it from me." Sam's tone changed abruptly. "What's the matter, Marge?"

She'd gone toward them with the knife upraised, intent upon doing something, saying something. What was it? She stared and passed a hand confusedly before her eyes, but it didn't come back. Binkie and Charlie and Hammy were all patting Sam Cleek on the back or shoulders. "Suits me, old chap," they were saying, and "That's the stuff."

Next evening at dinner, however, her memory was clearer. "What was Sam saying about forty dollars, Tom," she asked, "and you said—count me in—"

"Good Lord!" Tom put his fork down and pushed back his chair. "A man can't eat a meal in this house any more without being nagged about liquor."

"It was liquor, then?"

"Yes, and look here— You don't understand. I had to go in on it. A man can't let his friends down—"

"Tom"—it was a small voice—"where are you going to get the forty dollars?"

"I'm running this house," he returned sulkily.

"Call Binkie up." She was frightened. "Explain to him—"

"Never. Why, Marge— Why, good Lord, you *can't* do a thing like

that. You've got to be a sport about some things. We—we— I'll manage. Now, listen—"

### VIII

ANOTHER month passed, two months. The Lockharts were on the wagon, then off, then on again. Their periods of being on never lasted more than a week, however. The phone would buzz, and a party attended was a party that had to be returned. There was no escape.

It wasn't a boom season in the electric refrigerator business. The little house on Revere Street was without coal for a week. Fortunately the thermometer didn't descend very low, and Marge was able to keep the house fairly warm with the aid of the gas oven. She shuddered to think of what the gas bill would be. She didn't go in person to the markets any more; it was too humiliating a procedure.

One day the credit man from Baum & Blum's talked to Marge as she had never been talked to before, and when she tried to shut the door he put his foot in the way. "We've become the sort of people things like that happen to." With a miserable feeling she watched him drive away. "I can't stand this," she added bitterly to herself.

The next day the truck of the Peerless Radio Company backed into the drive and the period model they'd bought on payments was carried out by two men who left great muddy footprints on the floor and stared at Marge insolently.

That same morning a letter came about the roadster. The credit company intimated that unless payments were brought up-to-date at once the car would be claimed. Marge hid this communication. Let Tom find out about the radio first, she thought. He was looking worried enough.

It was a day or two later that Janet ran over with an invitation to go shopping. "I tried to get you—" She

laughed. "The operator said the phone had been disconnected."

Marge laughed, too.

"Evidently Tom's still carrying around in his pocket the letters I gave him two weeks ago," she said lightly. "He would!"

She went to the phone after Jan had left and wiggled the receiver. It was dead.

"Tom—" His wife met him at the door that night. "Why, what's the matter, Tom?"

"Nothing," he said. Then—"Only some more trouble, Marge— A man's never down that they don't jump on him. I was the last one in the office to-night, and old Grimes came out with a talk that would 've burned the hide off a rhinoceros. They're going to let a man go soon, it seems. He's always liked me, thinks I have stuff. All that rot. But— He gave me a fishy eye and asked if I'd been drinking—"

"Sacked, Tom?"

"Oh, no—not yet. Another chance, old lady."

A sigh of relief.

It all came out about the radio, then, and the car. "And the phone's—cut off, Tom."

"Aren't we the thrifty young suburbanites?" He ruffled her hair, but neglected to grin. "I'll go out next week and make things hot in the electric refrigerator business."

"No, you won't," she said dully. "You'll be all tired out and headachy from parties."

"What's the answer? Go dry again?"

"We can't, in this town. Tom, I was thinking. Look at this—" She handed him a paper.

"Opening of Fair Lee Manor," he read aloud. "English type homes now renting in beautiful new— Say, want to move, old lady? That it?" He looked at her, puzzled.

"We—we'll have to, Tom. We'll have to get away from the crowd. We can't keep up with them, and yet—we

can't break away in this town. That's been proved. It has boulevard lights, Tom, and"—her voice wavered—"silhouette street markers—"

"Fine."

"Don't be mean. It's fifteen miles farther down. We could start again. That's something!"

"Model home open until ten thirty," he read again, slowly. "All right, Marge," he said heavily. "Let's ride down. This thing has me stopped. I'll do anything you say. Can't lose the old job just now."

Neither of them was very happy, getting ready. Tom looked back from the door at the silent telephone.

"I guess the gang is trying to get us, about this time."

He tried to grin. In silence they climbed into the roadster, overhung with its almost visible pall of debt, and drove away soberly.

## IX

It was Fair Lee Manor, one week later.

Marge took the yellow and green and red raffia market basket down from its hook and pulled her coat collar up about her ears. It was cold in the new development, and there was a half mile to go to market—on foot. The roadster had been claimed. It was among those forgotten things that had belonged to living in Elkridge and having friends, good times.

Was it only a week since they'd lived in Elkridge? Sometimes, to Tom and Marge, it seemed a year. They'd cut themselves off completely. None of the gang knew where they were. This was the best plan, they'd agreed. Seven lonely nights they'd sat alone in a living room that faced on the new Mohawk Trail Boulevard—see silhouette street marker at corner—and to-night would be the eighth.

"We did this thing up in good shape, old lady." Tom would look up from his game of solitaire in the middle of an evening.

"It was the only way, Tom."

If he kept on trying to be cheerful Marge thought she would cry. She'd lower her head over her mending. Now, at last, she was catching up with the buttons on Tom's shirts.

"We had a bunch of friends just a jump or two ahead of us, that's all," Tom *post-mortemed*. "Next time I meet up with a fellow I'll ask him two questions—pronto. What's your income, son? and—Do you drink? Safety first, that's me."

"The walk will do me good," Marge thought, hurrying to market that eighth morning. "Speaking of friends"—she looked at the row of English manor type cottages drearily—"Tom *will* have his joke."

Every one on the block empty. They were the first renters. Might as well have moved into the wilderness. Marge shivered at the empty windows and gathered her coat close against the cutting wind.

She reached the greengrocer's and stood contemplating colored pyramids of vegetables and fruits. "At least I don't owe this man anything." She tried to rally her drooping spirits. "Now what would Tom like for dinner?" Poor Tom. He was getting bluer and bluer.

"Marge Lockhart!"

She was seized by the shoulder, spun around.

"Ruthie Boyd!"

Marge stared and Ruthie stared. They kissed each other feverishly. Then they stared again.

"For the love of little apples, Marge—" Ruthie broke the spell. She put an arm about Marge, patted her, giggled and wiped her eyes. "What are *you* doing out here where the gas pipes end, with a market basket?"

"We moved, Ruthie—" Marge patted and giggled too. "Tom was going to call Bink one of these days and invite you all down. I'll take a half pound of eggs and a half dozen cauliflower flowers and a—a quart of your best

spinach," she said deliriously to the greengrocer. "Ruthie Boyd!"

"Bink and I, too—" Ruthie clung to her, followed her about the store. "Give me the same," she directed the astonished clerk.

"Oh, Marge, it's been dreadful. I can't believe it's you. We've been here ten days, and we're the only people on our street excepting a man who writes algebras and his old maid sister. Think of it, Marge. Acres and acres of empty houses—and algebras! But we had to move. Binkie will kill me for telling it, but those awful liquor parties—"

"What—"

"It's true. They had us bankrupt. But don't tell Tom, will you? Bink would die if Tom knew. We've been skidding for a year, and I wanted to stop, but Bink would say: 'Listen, old girl, we can't let old Tom down, and the rest—'"

"Ruth Boyd—" Marge caught her arm. They were walking up Cherokee Trail now. "Stop and look at me. Did you say you moved out here on account of liquor?"

"Yes. We can't afford it. We simply can't. I told Bink it was nothing to be ashamed of— If you and Tom want to think we're poor sports—"

"Ruth! Listen! Tom and I, too. We moved for the same reason! We got in a terrible jam! We— Ruth—" Marge's voice went weak. "Look at that furniture van!"

"I'm looking." Ruth clutched her hand.

"It looks like Jan's stenciled card tables, doesn't it?"

"And the green dining room set that's authentic pre-Noah—"

"The spinning-wheel chair—"

"The grandfather clock—"

"Bibbsy's crib!"

"Come on, Marge."

Ruthie led the way up the steps and through a littered English type cottage. Edging around the huge upended green dining table they came upon Janet, sit-

ting on a brass-bound chest and drinking milk from a pint bottle through a straw. She was wiping a tear from one cheek and then from the other with a smudged handkerchief, and looked at the two intruders as though they were apparitions.

"Come in," she gulped at length. "I told Charlie we couldn't hide. Couldn't keep a secret from you two. Here—sit on the chest. The living room furniture's gone. They took it on—on account of the payments. They took the car, too, and the radio—" Janet talked as one to whom the worst has happened. "It was those awful liquor bills Charlie had—"

"Liquor bills!" Her visitors gasped and giggled, rocking back and forth on the chest. "Liquor bills!" they chorled.

"I told him it was all right for the rest of you, but we have a child. It just about killed us to leave you. We—"

"You haven't left us." Ruthie regained her control. "Wipe your eyes. Little Ruth and Bink are right around the corner."

"We're a block away, on Mohawk. On the trail of the lonesome t-tomahawk. Oh, Jan—" Marge rocked again.

"What's the matter with you two?" Jan looked at them with an access of smudged dignity.

"We moved, too, silly." Ruthie shook her. "To get away from you and Charlie and your vile liquor habits."

"What?" Janet looked at them stupidly. Finally she snickered faintly, and then went into hysterics.

"You—you—"

"Um-hum! Tell her, Marge."

"Our car went, too—"

"Our radio!"

"We were out of coal—"

"—the only place in town we could get certified milk for Bibbsy, and the vile creature said if we didn't pay up our bill—"



"—so I tried and tried to get the operator, and when I went next door to report they told me the service had been discontinued and I was paralyzed—"

"—and when the boss talked to poor Binkie like a father—"

"—Charlie had to let his insurance lapse—"

"We girls"—Janet sat up finally and resumed sipping her milk—"should have got together sooner with our little problem."

## X

It was at the sixth semiweekly meeting of the Sahara Club of Fair Lee Manor that Tom, as host, pressed the riotous membership of six into comparative quiet.

"Attention, everybody," he said in his best electric refrigerator manner. "I want to propose two new members—"

"Hear, hear!"

"They are Mr. Hamilton E. Starr and his wife, Mrs. Margaret Starr, formerly known in best bootlegging circles as Hammy and Peg—"

Those two individuals emerged from the hall and pandemonium broke.

"—think you're clever—" Peg's voice came clear. "Hammy and I just about died up there alone in ElkrIDGE looking at bills, so when the Peerless man came for the radio, Hammy said: 'Have you any idea where Lockhart moved to, or Boyd?' and he told us, and here we are. We're taking a little bungalow over in Sioux Lane. We sold the car, and Hammy's father gave him five hundred to pay on the bills on condition—"

"On condition—" the club chorused.

"That he never touches another drop," Peg said fearfully. "What's that you've got in those glasses?"

The Sahara Club emitted its battle cry:

"Ginger ale!"



## SPENDTHRIFTS

I LOVE those beggars standing there

Who beckon, whisper, shiver, plead,  
With outstretched naked arms and bare,  
Some old and gnarled, some young and fair,  
All for each other intercede!

The sun gave freely of his gold,

The pale moon shared each silver beam;  
Rain clouds brought nectar sweet and cold,  
Late Springtime clothed the beggars bold  
With buds; then leaves of shining green;

Before those robes were worn and old

Arrayed were they in golden leaves.  
But, now they've squandered all their gold,  
They beg for blankets Winter weaves;

Those precious spendthrifts—Autumn trees!

*May Vidler Horning*



NAI BENG SWALLOWED HARD, FOR THE MURDER OF A  
WHITE MAN WAS A SERIOUS MATTER

# The Stolen Teak Logs

*Raymond Mannering, king of the Siamese jungle,  
plays the star part in a strange drama that was  
staged on the waters of the Me Toom River*

By Reginald Campbell



RAYMOND MANNERING, of the Siam Wood Company, sat in the stern of his boat, watching intently the banks that slid past him on either hand. He was in the lower reaches of the Me Toom River, several days' journey away from the nearest human habita-

tion. Behind him, fifty miles to the north, lay his comfortable bungalow near Ban Huat. Ahead of him, fifty miles to the south, the native town of Paknampoh slumbered in the dazzling noonday heat. One hundred and forty miles south of Paknampoh men sipped ice-cold drinks in the civilized city of Bangkok.

Mannering wiped the sweat from his forehead, drank some tepid water from an earthenware jar, and resumed his watch on the river banks.

The scene that met his eyes was one of pitiless desolation. The low shores of the Me Toom were lined with solid walls of tall elephant grass that stretched as far as he could see in both directions. The rolling forest hills, clothed in the rich green of the jungle, had long since given way to the flat, swampy plains of central Siam, and not a tree, not a splash of color, not a sign of animal life, was anywhere to be seen. The land, cut by the sluggish ribbon of the Me Toom, lay as if dead, and over it, high in the zenith, the blazing sun shone out of heavens that were a smoky brass.

Mannering was not concerned with any lack of beauty in the landscape, however, for somewhere in this desolate stretch of river the teak logs belonging to his company were being stolen by the score. Odd drift logs, washed past the rafting station at Ban Huat, had disappeared in mysterious fashion; and now that the rains were over, and all the company's rafts had arrived safely at Bangkok, the white man was at leisure to journey down the river in an effort to trace the thieves.

The boat in which he traveled, known to the natives as a *rua phama*, resembled a sampan, and was poled by four Siamese, who for hour after hour sent the craft skimming downstream with arms that were tireless. In the center of the boat crouched Ai Kong, Mannering's Kamoo servant, now performing the duties of both boy and cook. Towed by a rope behind the stern there danced a tiny dugout, laden with spare food. It was Ai Kong's special care, that dugout, for in it were carried many of the tinned delicacies that delighted his master's heart.

"Ai Kong," said Mannering, as he thought of that little store of food, "the hour for the midday rest has

come. Bid the polemen draw up alongside the bank. Then open for me a tin of sardines, and see that thou dost not lick them this time before serving them to me!"

The boy grinned, and soon the boats were moored in the shade of some tall overhanging rushes. The meal eaten, Mannering was about to sink into a doze, when a small opening in the river bank some twenty yards distant attracted his attention. Five minutes later, regardless of the heat, he was making his way along the bank of a muddy creek that ran inland at right angles to the river.

Soon the Me Toom and his boats disappeared from sight behind him, and his only view was a lane of shimmering mud, fringed on either side by languid, whispering reeds. The stench of the mud was overpowering, and the heavy air was like the breath of a furnace, yet he pushed on, for he knew that in some such creek as this the stolen logs would be discovered.

After a hundred yards' progress he rounded a bend, whereupon he came to an abrupt halt and a low whistle came from his lips. Ahead of him, nestling in the slime, lay at least fifty of his company's logs, and—wonder of wonders—beyond them a village on stilts rose up against the sky.

Mannering rubbed his eyes, but the illusion persisted and the village remained. Cut off from sight of the river by the wall of elephant grass, it rested on legs in the midst of a swampy sea of mud. It was a travesty, an abortion, a nightmare of a village; yet a village it was, and shortly the white man was wallowing in and out between rows and rows of stilts.

Heads poked out of the attap-roofed shanties above him. They were strange-looking heads, with unkempt thatches of dusty-colored hair and fierce, animal-like eyes.

"Your headman!" he shouted to them in Siamese. "I would talk to him."

Heads popped in again without replying, and Mannering waded on, till finally he lurched up against the piles of a hut that was larger than the rest, and whose sides were built entirely of teak—a significant fact.

Gripping the bottom of the ladder that connected the hut with the ground, he sucked his boots out of the mud and climbed up into the dwelling. There a lean, middle-aged gentleman awaited him, holding a drawn knife.

"Put that away," said Mannering sharply, as he fingered his revolver. "Art thou the headman?"

"I am," answered the native, in a Siamese dialect that was new to the white man, but not unintelligible. "My name is Nai Beng."

"Well, Nai Beng, it would appear from the look of things that soon all thy village will be built of teak!"

"I do not comprehend your talk," said the headman, and his shifty eyes ran uneasily over the newcomer's towering form.

"When the natives of this country speak to me, they are wont to address me as lord or master," said Mannering icily.

"That is entirely their affair," answered Nai Beng with a shrug of his shoulders.

Mannering smiled in spite of himself. Of a truth this was a strange village. Situated miles and miles away from the haunts of normal men, it rested on its stilts like some gigantic spider standing upon a sea of mud. Save for an occasional water buffalo that wallowed in the slime, no domestic animals of any kind were visible, and on what the inhabitants lived he could not imagine. They seemed to be a race apart from other men, and he felt that in the person of Nai Beng he would have a difficult customer to deal with.

"Thy insolence I will overlook this time," he told the other, "because doubtless Nai Beng knows little of the great outside world."

"This is the world," remarked the headman, waving a skinny arm toward the gleaming expanse of mud, "and I know all of it."

"Including that part of the Me Toom River that flows at the foot of thy creek?"

"Including even that," conceded the other.

"Then Nai Beng must know that the logs which pass down the river are the property of a great white company, and that therefore any drift log must be picked up by the company's raftsmen, and by no one else."

"I know nothing of this," lied Nai Beng.

"Nai Beng has done evil in that he dragged more than fifty of the company's logs up his creek and concealed them."

"That is not true," said the headman. "The logs floated up the creek by themselves during the last big rise in the river."

"Ho, did they?" barked Mannering. "And I suppose thy hut built itself of teak without thy aid?"

"Such was not the case," said Nai Beng gravely. "The hut I built from a teak log that I bought from a native trader."

"Thou art a great villain, Nai Beng, and I shall report thee to the police, who will come and cast thee into prison in distant Bangkok."

"That they cannot do, for where is the proof that I have stolen the company's logs?"

Mannering bit his lip, for proof would indeed be hard to obtain. It was not absolutely impossible that an eddy of the flooded river might have carried a few logs into the creek. Proof or no proof, however, he was determined to put a stop to Nai Beng's operations, and he addressed the native once more.

"Thou shalt drag these logs back to the river by the aid of thy buffaloes," he said sternly; "and never shalt thou steal another teak log!"



"My buffaloes rest. They will continue to rest," replied the other in even tones.

"Nai Beng" — Mannering wagged a lean finger at the headman's surly brown face — "the commands that I have given thee shall be obeyed. Remember, I have spoken, and I never break my word!"

This said, he climbed down the ladder and wallowed through the mud in the direction of the river. Back in his *rua phama*, he called for Ai Kong.

"Ai Kong," said he, "we stay here for the night, so that all the men may rest."

"As the lord wills," replied Ai Kong.

The boy slunk off forward. Mannering closed his eyes, but he did not sleep, for his brain was working actively.

## II

ALONE in his hut, Nai Beng gave himself up to profound meditation. The white man's visit had come as a distinct shock to him, for it threatened to upset his long cherished plan of rebuilding his village with teak. That he had done wrong in dragging the company's logs up his creek he was perfectly aware; but, secure in the fact that his village was unknown to the outside world, he had felt sure that the theft would escape detection.

And now—Nai Beng spat betel juice viciously on the split bamboo flooring—now this strange white man had come and threatened to put him into prison, of all places! Well, he must either return the logs to the river or brazen the matter out. Which should he do?

He brooded. Gradually the sun climbed down the smoky heavens, hung poised on the rim of a molten lake of mud, and then sank below the dim horizon. Still Nai Beng sat alone with his thoughts, which were finally disturbed by the entry of one of his wives with his evening tot of rice toddy. He

drained the fiery spirit at a gulp and croaked for more, which was brought him.

Time passed, also a good deal of rice toddy, and by nine o'clock, when the moon was turning the mud to quicksilver, he began to feel as brave as a lion. His village would be built of teak after all, and upon the white man he would lay a very terrible curse, so that his enemy would die a sudden and terrible death.

Nai Beng rose from his hams, and was about to summon the aid of the devils that goggled and flitted over the surrounding marsh, when a sound below his shanty caused him to draw his knife and hasten to the top of the ladder. Looking down, he beheld four black forms crawling up toward him, and he raised his weapon threateningly.

The foremost of the figures laid a finger to its lips.

"Hist!" it whispered. "We are the polemen of the Lord Mannering, and we come in peace."

A few moments later all four were squatting on the floor of the headman's hut, with Nai Beng regarding them suspiciously.

"Lord and great one," said the tallest of the four, "it is about the Lord Mannering that we have come to talk with you."

"The white man has not departed?" asked Nai Beng in surprise.

"No, master, for even now he is in his boat on the river, at the mouth of your creek."

"Huh!" grunted Nai Beng, wondering what was toward.

"Lord," continued the other, "we know that the Lord Mannering is displeased with you, and would fain put you into prison. Now only one hour ago he did tell us to look secretly around your village, to see if we could find trace of hidden saws. Lord and great one, by the aid of the moon we discovered certain things; but before returning to our boat we decided to come first to you."

"Sons of a dog!" croaked Nai Beng, scenting blackmail.

"Now listen, great one. We hate the Lord Mannering, for he works us hard and pays us but little. It is our opinion that you also have cause to hate him; wherefore would it help both you and us if the Lord Mannering were to die."

"Umph!" breathed the headman, as his brain tried to fathom the thoughts of the four polemen.

"We know that in this creek are fifty teak logs of the Great Company," resumed the tall native. "Seemingly it is your desire to build your village of teak; but, lord, if the logs were sold at Paknampoh you would gain much more profit, since they would fetch good money there."

"Your tale is long, like that of an old woman," said Nai Beng impatiently.

"Master, soon you will understand," replied the other. "I will explain our plan. Many times in the past have we poled the Lord Mannering down to Paknampoh, where he goes each year to sell logs in the teak market there, and we have come to know a certain Chinaman in the town who buys stolen timber."

"Does the white man know this Chinaman?"

"Great one, he does *not*, and we think that if the Lord Mannering were to die, the logs in your creek could be rafted down to Paknampoh, where the Chinaman would give three thousand ticals for them, which is half of their real value."

Nai Beng pondered deeply. If the polemen were to be trusted, their scheme was a most attractive one. To build his village of teak was good, but to obtain three thousand ticals in cash was even better. Three thousand ticals! His brain reeled at the thought of so much wealth. With it he could buy buffaloes, blankets, food without end, and even a small elephant. Three thousand ticals!

The voice of the tall poleman broke in on his thoughts.

"Great one, if your buffaloes could drag the timber out into the river again, we could then make the logs up into a raft, which we would pole down to Paknampoh. There a meeting between you and the Chinaman could be arranged; but for these services a commission is required."

"How much?" asked Nai Beng.

"One hundred ticals for each of us."

"It is too much!"

"Then we take not the raft to Paknampoh."

"I give eighty, *after* the Chinaman pays the money over."

There followed much haggling, and eventually an agreement was reached at ninety ticals for each of the polemen.

"And now," said the tall one, after the matter had been satisfactorily arranged, "there is the matter of the Lord Mannering's death."

"I will have naught to do with that in person," said Nai Beng with emphasis.

"Lord, we ourselves will bring this about to-night. Thinking you might agree with our proposal, we took the liberty of drugging the white man's dinner as it was cooking. This did we do when his boy's back was turned, and the Lord Mannering must now be sleeping like a pig whose throat has been gashed."

"And the boy—what of him?" inquired Nai Beng.

"Pah, he sleeps like the Kamoo dog that he is, for we drugged his rice also. Moreover, being a Kamoo, he is a great fool and will cause us no trouble, though he can be killed afterward, if necessary."

"There is another matter," breathed the headman after a pause. "It is the disposal of the white man's belongings that he has with him. Doubtless he has money on his person, but of that his polemen should know better than I."

"Great one, the Lord Mannering carries his money in a small wooden box, which he keeps by his bed. Two, three, four hundred ticals it may be, but no more. This sum, together with his store of food and his clothes, might well be shared among the four of us and your honor, if that is your honor's wish."

"It is my wish," said Nai Beng decidedly, rising to his feet. "And now"—he glanced out at the moon that sailed through the huge purple dome of sky—"the hour is late. The polemen will act soon?"

"They will act at once," said the speaker of the four.

"I would fain see for myself the killing of the Lord Mannering," said Nai Beng, who, being dishonest himself, was suspicious of other men.

"If the great one would go in silence to the fringe of the reeds overlooking the river, the moon will show him much."

"I will go," declared Nai Beng.

### III

ELEVEN o'clock that night found Nai Beng crouching amid the reeds on the edge of the Me Toom River. Every object stood out in sharp black and white under the cold brilliance of the moon. The farther bank was a penciled line of black, while the river between ran quietly, a long, broad ribbon of white velvet. On the near side Mannering's boat, bathed in the white radiance, varied between pools of inky darkness and patches of wan light. The silence, save for the murmur of the current against the sides of the craft, was absolute.

The better part of an hour passed, and then Nai Beng, watching intently, saw four black forms creep stealthily along the boat toward the stern. With gleaming knives in their hands, they passed the boy's sleeping place and arrived at the shelter farthest aft. Into this they disappeared, and blackness swallowed them.

The running water sucked against the bank, and the boat rocked slightly. Simultaneously from within the shelter a bubbling, choking sound came to the watcher's ears, to be stilled a moment later.

The four dark forms reappeared on deck, and their knives gleamed no longer, for the weapons were a dark purple to halfway up the hilt. Soon a sagging figure, with drooping arms and lolling head, was dragged out of the shelter. The moonlight caught it, and Nai Beng had a momentary glimpse of the drawn, ghastly features of Raymond Mannering.

A second later, with a faint splash, the body went overboard. It sank, then came to the surface. The current seized it, and, spread-eagled and horrible, the sprawling limbs were swirled around a bend in the river, to vanish into the blackness of the night.

Nai Beng swallowed hard, for the murder of the white man was a serious matter; but with an effort he withdrew his gaze from the rippling water and looked at the boat once more.

The polemen were now creeping toward the boy's little shelter. He saw them bend down over it, then straighten themselves quickly. A moment later they were running from one end of the boat to the other, and from their gestures it was evident to the watcher that part of their plan had miscarried.

"Nai Beng!" The tallest of the polemen suddenly hissed the words through the silent night. "You are there?"

"I am here," whispered the headman from the reeds.

The other spoke louder.

"The Lord Mannering is dead. You have seen?"

"I have seen."

"But the boy Ai Kong—*me wooi*, he is nowhere to be found. Also the Lord Mannering's cash box and the small dugout at the back of the boat are missing."

Nai Beng rose from his place of concealment and climbed into the *rua phama*.

"What is that thou sayest?" he snarled.

"That boy," said the poleman hoarsely, "is not such a fool as we think. Perhaps he see us drug the food, after all. Perhaps he let the master eat the drugged food, but not touch it himself. Then, while we go visit you, great one, that boy go and steal the cash box and escape in the dugout."

Nai Beng swore. Then the oath died on his lips, for a high, whining scream pierced suddenly through the night. He gripped his companion's arm, and the black-brown of his face turned gray in the wan rays of the moon.

"The spirit of the white man!" he gasped.

"Great one, that is no spirit, but a whistling teal overhead," said the poleman, but his voice caught slightly in his throat.

Nai Beng drew a hand across his damp forehead, and pulled himself together.

"The hour is late," he muttered. "I return to my village. Stay you here, for, though the cash box is gone, there is still the profit to be made from the selling of the timber."

"The lord speaks truth," said his companion. "If the lord wills, the work of dragging out the logs from the creek can be commenced to-morrow morning."

Nai Beng nodded, then strode back to the village; and the four polemen, having cleaned their knives, sank into profound and blissful slumber.

A week later a small teak raft, containing fifty logs from which all the company hammer marks had been removed, was slipping downstream, in the dusk of evening, near the outskirts of Paknampoh. Soon the dwellings of the town were dimly visible on either

bank of the river. House after house was passed in absolute silence, and finally, by dexterous poling, the raft was brought to rest on the soft mud of a backwater at the southern end of the market place.

The tall poleman pointed to a wooden structure that loomed up against the sky above them. A faint light glimmered from within the building, and a look of satisfaction came into his eyes.

"The Chinaman's house," he whispered to Nai Beng, who stood beside him. "I think the Chinaman still awake, and I go seek him."

The speaker disappeared into the house, leaving his three companions and Nai Beng on the raft. Five minutes passed; then the man returned, accompanied by a figure carrying a lantern in its hand.

"The Chinaman's secretary," whispered the tall poleman to Nai Beng. "He come to examine the timber we sell."

The secretary bent, and, with the aid of the lantern, made a thorough examination of each log. This done, he beckoned, and the whole party climbed stealthily into the house. They entered a large and airy room, illuminated by dim oil lamps. In the center of the room was a table, at which a Chinaman sat. He wore rich silken robes and a pair of gold spectacles. He was old and thin, and looked very wise and very cunning.

He nodded to the secretary, who approached him. They muttered together in sibilant whispers, speaking a language that none of his hearers could understand. Then the Chinaman cleared his throat.

"Who sells this timber?" he asked in Siamese.

Nai Beng took a pace forward toward the table. Behind him stood the four polemen; at his side drooped the secretary; in front of him sat the thin Chinaman.

"I do," he said importantly.



"My secretary reports that the logs are not of such quality as they might be. Therefore can I give only one thousand ticals for them," said the Chinaman.

Now the logs were very good logs indeed. They were large, sound, and straight, and Nai Beng, being fully aware of this, was not to be caught napping.

"No better logs than these can be found in the whole of Siam," he answered decidedly.

The Chinaman drew in his breath with a sucking hiss.

"My secretary states that the logs appear to have come from some inferior forest, and he is rarely mistaken."

"Nai Beng"—the tall poleman was speaking—"tell the Chinaman the truth, for he is to be trusted, being himself a receiver of stolen goods, and therefore hateful of the law."

"That is so," said the Chinaman with emphasis.

"The logs," said Nai Beng, "come from the forest of the Great Company, and all people know that their teak timber is the best in the world. Therefore your secretary is greatly mistaken, Lord Chinaman!"

The Chinaman turned to his secretary.

"Thou hast heard?" he asked.

"I have heard," replied the scribe; "yet I cannot believe this."

"Nevertheless it is the truth that I have spoken," said Nai Beng, and the four polemen chorused assent.

"In that case I believe," said the secretary, and he blew long and loud upon a small whistle that he had extracted from a fold in his garments.

#### IV

NAI BENG stared in dazed fashion at the steel handcuffs that now encircled his wrists. Then he raised his head and blinked, for six men in the khaki uniforms of the Siamese police had come from nowhere into the room.

"What—what is this?" he stuttered at last.

"Nai Beng," said one of the policemen, "thou art arrested on a charge of timber stealing, the proof of which has come from thine own lips. There may also be a further and more serious charge against thee of conspiring to murder."

Nai Beng's cheeks went ashen, and he completely lost his head.

"Of murder I know naught," he gasped. "If it is of the Lord Mannering you speak, there are his murderers!"

He jerked an elbow in the direction of the four polemen, who stood outside the group. A low cackle of laughter ran around the room.

"They are no murderers," said one of the police, when the mirth had subsided. "They are policemen like ourselves."

"They—they killed the Lord Mannering! I myself witnessed the deed," mouthed Nai Beng.

"They did not." The thin old Chinaman was speaking. "I am the Lord Mannering, and remember, Nai Beng, I never break my word!"

Closely escorted by the policemen, Nai Beng disappeared. Then Raymond Mannering rose to his feet.

"Major," he said to the secretary, "don't prefer the most serious charge against the fellow. After all, he's rafted fifty of my logs halfway down to Bangkok for nothing. I have quite a kindly feeling for him!"

The Siamese major grinned.

"As you like, Mr. Mannering," he said in perfect English.

Raymond pointed to the four polemen.

"I wish to bring to your notice, major, the conduct of these four men. It was admirable, and the way the sergeant must have played up to Nai Beng couldn't have been beaten."

"We Siamese are good at acting," said the major. "I often think we

could be the best actors in the world, if only we had the chance, and I expect my men enjoyed the little drama they helped you to play. Still, I'll remember what you said and mark 'em out for special promotion. Well, we'll be off, for it's late."

He gave an order, the four poleman saluted stiffly, and all five marched out of the room. As they vanished, Mannering shouted for his boy, and presently Ai Kong slunk in.

"Nai Beng has been caught and is in prison, therefore take these infernal trappings off me at once," ordered his master.

The boy took off the clothes and folded them away. As he did so, Mannering gazed long and earnestly at the black, surly, enigmatic features of his servant.

"Ai Kong," he said suddenly, "thou art a villain!"

"Lord, of that we are both aware,"

replied the boy dryly.

"Tell me this, knave—on the night when, by my directions, Ai Kong took the money box, and then waited for me in his dugout around the bend of the river, did not a certain thought strike him?"

"Meaning, master, that I would gain much if I really bolted with the cash and left you to die when you floated down the river?"

"Meaning even that."

"Lord, I stay and wait for you because I fear you. Also"—a grin flitted across the black features—"I think perhaps you not altogether trust me. I think perhaps you take the money all out before you give me the box."

"It struck me that Ai Kong might reason thus, and therefore I left the money in the box," said Mannering gently.

"We be clever men, you and I, master. Good night!"



### OLD OCEAN INNS

WHAT ancient memories hang about each rafter  
Of ocean inns that are become as ghosts;  
What thoughts of flapping cards and seaman's laughter,  
What clink of cups in hands of guests and hosts?

Something remembered from the years of yore  
Returns to haunt them when the dusk-hour fails;  
The clank of swords and crash of chairs on floor,  
The noise of scuttled ships and moan of gales.

Something remains to make them mindful yet  
Of treasure chests, dim maps, rare jewels, bright coins;  
Of tall spars gleaming in the late sunset;  
Of moonlit surf around the old pier's loins;

Perchance, John Silver blustering salty tales  
Of secret trips, gold coasts and pirate sails.

*Walter Evans Kidd*



# The Greatest Football Game of All Time

By George Trevor

Author of "The Greatest Football Player of All Time," etc.



**W**HAT was the greatest football game ever played? That's a hard one to answer; there are so many thrilling contests to choose from.

What gridiron student can forget the 1907 Yale-Princeton battle, with the Tigers leading 10 to 0 at half time, only to wilt before the blond fury that was Ted Coy? It was Yale 12, Prince-

ton 10, when the cold November sun slid behind the beetling face of West Rock that day.

There, then, was a comeback to stir the blood in the most sluggish of veins, but no more so than Washington and Jefferson's uphill fight to a 14 to 13 victory over Lafayette at the Polo Grounds a few years ago, or Snaky Smythe's last-ditch run that made it possible for a seemingly beaten Army

team to nose out Navy in 1923.

Football is studded with nerve-racking Garrison finishes. What about that seesaw Service School tussle at Chicago in 1926, with first West Point and then Annapolis snatching the lead. The early darkness of a Lake Michigan evening left the embattled Cadets and Middies in an unsatisfying 21 to 21 deadlock.

That dusk-bound finish was a sure enough pippin, but not a whit more gripping than the 1924 race for the goal line between Chicago and Illinois, with the ponderous Maroons spotting "Red" Grange three touchdowns and then bludgeoning their way to a tie. Honors were even in that unforgettable duel which saw the juggernaut offset a titian-headed phantom.

Almost any Ohio State-Michigan game of the post-war era would have strained fluttering hearts to the breaking point, nor must we overlook the no quarter asked or given scrap, between Notre Dame's Four Horsemen and Stanford's golden-thatched projectile, Ernie Nevers.

By the term, "greatest football game," is meant the most exciting, the most dramatic contest rather than the most perfectly played. Many a masterpiece of tactical technic has been as drab and stale as last year's calendar.

Every football fan is entitled to his own opinion, but when Alonzo Stagg and William Roper—representing a combined gridiron experience of more than half a century—unite in picking the Princeton-Chicago game of 1922 as the most dramatic of their coaching careers, the writer is inclined to string along with them.

Lonny and Bill have seen a lot of touchdowns dent the cleat-marked turf. They have tasted every thrill football has to offer, and neither of them wants to relive those agonizing sixty minutes when West and East fought savagely for yards worth their weight in gold and gave the lie to Rudyard Kipling's famous dictum.

Chicago was a three to one favorite in the betting that red-letter October afternoon in 1922 when, for the first time in history, a Princeton football team invaded the middle West. "Old Man" Stagg, as much a part of the University of Chicago as the maroon he had himself chosen for the college color, had put together a stone-cracking juggernaut which hit an enemy line with the finality of the Theban phalanx. Wise Epaminondas would have grinned to see his tactical method transplanted from the battlefield of Leuctra to the modern gridiron.

## II

PRINCETON grads from every mid-Western city and black earth farm flocked to the Midway that afternoon, prepared to tear their lungs out in a lost cause. They came praying for a miracle, but fully expecting to see the burgundy-jersied giants go like a steam roller over Bill Roper's cagy eleven. They had read in the Eastern papers that Princeton had one of its traditionally alert teams, a resourceful, versatile bunch of opportunists, quick to cash a fumble at the touchdown bank.

Tiger grads recalled Arthur Poe's defeat-cheating runs, Tilly Lamar's last ditch dash, Sam White's affinity for a loose ball, but they feared that not even eleven Sam Whites with eleven horseshoes concealed about their persons could halt this man-killing Chicago juggernaut. Remember this was before Roper's outfit had earned its significant if somewhat banal nickname—"the team of destiny."

"The City Gray," famed in Chicago battle songs, looked like a Brobdignagian ant hive as game time drew near. "I could have sold two hundred thousand tickets if the stadium had been big enough," moaned the Chicago ticket director as he shook his head to pleas from intimate friends and influential politicians.

Stagg Field, with its inadequate forty thousand seats, had been sold out



weeks in advance. Not even standing room could be bought for what mid-Westerners were convinced would be a Waterloo for the once Napoleonic East.

The corn belt smacked its lips, anticipating a second Tiger pelt in "Old Man" Stagg's trophy room. The whole mid-West was out to show this member of the so-called "Big Three" that the glory of Princeton, Yale, and Harvard was one with Nineveh and Tyre.

The Princeton players were perhaps the only persons at Stagg Field who didn't anticipate being sacrificed to make a Chicago holiday. "Old Doctor" Roper, a disciple of suggestion, had fed his pupils recurrent doses of psychology.

As they ate in the Nassau Field house, they stared at placards proclaiming: "A team that won't be beat can't be beat," and "We are going to win every game on our schedule." The inspiring words of Johnny Poe proved prophetic. This surprising Princeton team wasn't born "to be beat."

Self-sacrifice for a common cause was the predominant note in Princeton's 1922 long-shot victories. Just before the Tigers took the field at Chicago, Roper told Emery, his regular fullback, that the coaching board of strategy had decided to replace him with Caldwell.

"I think Caldwell is the better man to start," replied the keenly disappointed Emery. "He's been going better than I have." This putting of the team ahead of personal desire was typical of Dickinson's eleven.

As they spread out over Stagg Field, a gridiron hallowed by the churning cleats of Eckersall, Steffen, Heston, Hirschberger, O'Dea, McGovern, Stevenson, and other legendary heroes, the Tiger players commented on the springy, lush-looking quality of the billiard table turf.

The field was as smooth as a putting green, a novelty to Eastern players ac-

customed to skinned or thinly covered gridirons. "Gee, boy, we should be able to run on this," chirped Jack Cleaves to Ken Smith.

How huge the Chicago players looked in their form-fitting deep maroon jerseys! What swank figures they cut in their tailor made uniforms! It might have been some crack platoon of the pre-war Prussian guard, stepping out smartly for parade.

Princeton's warriors, shoddy, unkempt as always, presented a sloppy contrast. In their tattered, dirt-be-grimed jerseys, their patched moleskins varying in hue from faded green to sweat-stained brown, and their motley assortment of helmets, the Tigers looked as if they had stepped from the pages of "Huckleberry Finn."

It seems to be a Princeton tradition that football players should have a hard-boiled look. Perhaps the Poes, with their contempt for "putting on dog," set this disheveled fashion. In this meeting on Stagg Field it was the supposedly rough and ready West that held fast to the Beau Brummel tradition.

### III

A WHISTLE shrilled. The slaughter began as per schedule. The game wasn't two minutes old before the veriest tyro understood that the smallish Tiger linemen couldn't stop Chicago's pile driving mass on tackle.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat!* As a pneumatic riveter drives home a red-hot bolt, so did the burly Maroon backs sledge a path through Princeton's physically overmatched tackles. There was no iron worker's "dolly bar" to buck up that weakening Tiger line against the thrust of the Chicago riveters.

Sixty yards down field moved the Chicago phalanx for all the world like a blood red caterpillar crawling along a dark green leaf. Princeton's forwards had never faced such relentless power. They were shoved contemptuously aside as if they were pygmies.

Thus it is that a mastiff handles a yapping terrier.

Before the raccoon-coated grads could sample their hip flasks, Chicago was over for the first touchdown. What matter if the goal was missed? Who cared?

Confident in their strength, the Chicago players were annoyed rather than worried when Princeton leaped ahead with a surprising touchdown at the start of the second quarter. A far flung Tiger pass caught the Maroon secondaries sound asleep. They awoke to find the ball on their seven yard stripe.

Princeton punched it over for a touchdown in four lunges. A two-yard penalty enabled Nassau to eke out the distance. The goal was kicked: Princeton 7, Chicago 6.

"Let's go!" shouted Tiny Lewis, the hulking Maroon captain. "Go, Chicago!" echoed the Midway cheering section.

Chicago went! Sliding inside the Tiger tackles, bulling their way through center, the mulberry jersied backs ate up the chalk marks.

John Thomas, sinewed like an Andalusian bull, hammered Princeton's groggy line to a pulp. It was "Thomas five yards—Thomas six yards—Thomas five yards." When Thomas began to wobble a bit, Staggs sent in Zorn.

From Princeton's standpoint this was a change for the worst. "Zorn seven yards through guard—Zorn eight yards inside tackle," droned the announcer.

"Take out Zorn and put back Thomas!" bellowed a Princeton wag. Before the laughter died away, Chicago had its second touchdown.

Again the goal was missed. Who gave a darn? The score was 12 to 7, now, with the West riding high, and more to come.

That more wasn't long in coming. Near the close of the third quarter the Maroon tank crunched its way across

the Princeton goal for the third and last time. Need we add that the goal try fizzled? Who cared? Nobody at that moment, but those three failures to convert were soon to plague Chicagoans as Job was never tortured by all his flock of boils. Those three points were to spell the difference between an unsatisfying tie and a heart-breaking defeat.

The teams changed sides for the last period. Chicago punted deep to little Gorman, who caught the pigskin in the shadow of his own uprights and, whirling quickly, essayed a daring lateral pass to Cleaves. A stony-hearted referee ruled that the ball had been thrown forward. Princeton was penalized back to her own two-yard line.

Now came the all or nothing play that confounded Chicago and changed the course of football destiny. Conservative copy book strategy called for Princeton to punt out from behind her goal line. Had she done so, Chicago must surely have won. Consider how hopeless was Princeton's situation, pinned against her goal posts, trailing 7 to 18, with barely twelve minutes to play.

It was a time for drastic remedies, and swaggering, insolent little Johnny Gorman was the chap to stake everything on one throw of the dice. A born gambler, this presumptuous Tiger pilot, the sort that breaks the bank at Monte Carlo.

"Kick formation—Cleaves back!" barked Gorman.

Watching anxiously from the sideline, Coach Roper saw Gorman whisper in Cleaves's ear. These two had been schoolmates at Mercersburg, and they were noted for improvising plays under pressure, for concocting schemes that weren't in "the book." Perhaps those giant Chicago linemen wouldn't have been so cocksure that Princeton would kick had they known Cleaves and Gorman better.

"Block that punt!" chanted Chicago's cheering section. Scenting an-

other touchdown, the Maroons tried desperately to obey that slogan. They stormed through blindly, arms flailing the air for the kick that never came.

Cool as an iced shad, Cleaves faked a punt, pivoted to his right, and arched a long pass over toward the east sideline. Running on the wings of the dank Lake Michigan wind, little Gorman kept his rendezvous with that flying ball. He picked it out of the air with his finger tips and darted to mid-field before the Chicago safety man nailed him.

There was nothing gentle about that tackle. They had to carry Gorman off the field. Not until later did he realize that the play he had originated on the spur of the moment started the train of events which culminated in victory.

#### IV

PRINCETON was forced to kick, and now luck smiled on the Tigers. Chicago's substitute center made a crazy snap to Zorn. The ball struck Zorn's shoulder and caromed straight into the arms of Howard Gray, Princeton's alert end.

Gray didn't have to break his stride. Clutching this gift from the gods, he scampered forty-three yards across the Maroon goal. The try for point succeeded. The score was Chicago 18, Princeton 14, with six minutes to go!

Up in the stand the white haired president of the Union Pacific, who had called off a board of directors meeting to see his son play end for Princeton, cut loose a most undignified yell.

"That's my boy! That's my kid, Howard!" was the tenor of Papa Gray's remarks. He wanted the world to know—and can you blame him?

That unexpected touchdown "hopped up" the Princeton team as a shot of dope energizes a cocaine addict. Quicker than a Yale Tap Day delegate can shout "Go to your room!" this incredible Princeton team had the game won.

The Tiger backs, hitherto impotent on attack, became whirling dervishes, unstoppable berserkers. The Tiger forwards, who had butted futile heads against the Maroon wall, suddenly started to open gaps worthy of a Ned Glass.

A shrewdly masked pass completed Chicago's discomfiture, placing the ball on the Maroon's seven-yard line. Then Chicago braced. Three Tiger lunges left the leather still three yards this side of Paradise.

Over on the Princeton bench things were stirring. Burly Crum, nicknamed "Maud" because of his mulelike "kick" on close order plunges, pleaded with Roper:

"Fourth down—three yards to go—two minutes to play! I can score that touchdown, coach, put me in!"

Roper heeded Crum's plea. It was a hunch. "All right, go in!" ordered the Tiger leader.

Crum went—and he didn't stop going until he had knifed over Chicago's goal for the winning touchdown. The try split the uprights: Princeton 21, Chicago 18.

That's what the score board said, but the Maroons didn't intend it to be final. From the cedar closet where they had kept their cleverly designed aerial attack wrapped up in moth balls, they dug up the neglected forward pass. The air was full of footballs, and every one of them came to rest in maroon-jersied arms.

It was what "Old Man" Stagg had been waiting for. During the intermission he had begged his quarterback to use the pass. "They've tightened up their line defense—throw the ball!" he had ordered. Now, with the seconds ticking away, with defeat mocking them, his men finally took to the air.

That flurry of Chicago passes devoured distance. Strohmeier caught the final toss on Princeton's six-yard stripe. Thirty seconds to play—and the Chicago quarterback switched back

to his old line hammering tactics.

*Whang!* two yards inside tackle. *Biff!* two yards through center. Again came the thud of colliding bodies and only a yard separated the yellow egg from the last chalk mark. Fourth down—a yard to go—a second to play!

Lonny Stagg was gritting his teeth. How many times had he warned his quarterback that a straight line is not the shortest distance between two points on the football field!

Bill Roper, supposedly hard boiled, turned his eyes away from the field. Behind the big Maroon line John Thomas crouched for the plunge that meant victory or defeat. His sweat-stained face was haggard, the corners of his mouth were drawn down in a Lon Chaney scowl.

Facing him, Princeton's bedraggled forwards dug their cleats into the turf. Wingate, peppery Tiger quarterback, stormed to and fro behind his linemen, slapping one on the back, kicking another, exhorting them to hold. From the stadium above came a staccato babel, meaning: "Hurry, Chicago!"

## V

HIGH up in the east stand a grizzled Princeton grad, between nips from a generous hip flask, had been shouting maudlin advice to the Princeton quarterback all afternoon. The old boy has

yelled himself hoarse, telling the Tigers what formations to use, to whom to give the ball, and how to stop Chicago's mass plays.

Now, in this extremity, he surrendered the wheel. Taking an extra long swig of bourbon, he summoned what was left of his voice and bellowed: "Boys, I've done the best I can for you; you'll have to use your own judgment now!"

Princeton's judgment was as good as Chicago's was bad. Still you would hardly call it judgment, for every Tiger knew intuitively that Chicago would stake its last throw on a straight center buck.

Those solid striped legs massed for the charge. The Nassau secondaries, disregarding their exposed flanks, converged toward the middle, blanketing the Maroon wave.

For a heart-sickening second it seemed as if Thomas's leather helmet projected across the line. Then he collapsed in a welter of black and orange, a few scant inches short of the white-washed stripe.

Nobody heard the whistle, so deafening was the tension snapping roar that went up from the crowd. The final score: Princeton 21, Chicago 18. So it stands.

Did you ever see or hear of a game to match this one?



## IF CLOUDS WERE ALL—

LIFE is so filled with meaning:  
A journey through vales of pain,  
Bleak winds through the soul careening—  
And a sunburst, after rain.

Life is so filled with losses,  
With the usurer, fate to pay,  
And of shoulders bearing their crosses—  
And of victories, day by day.

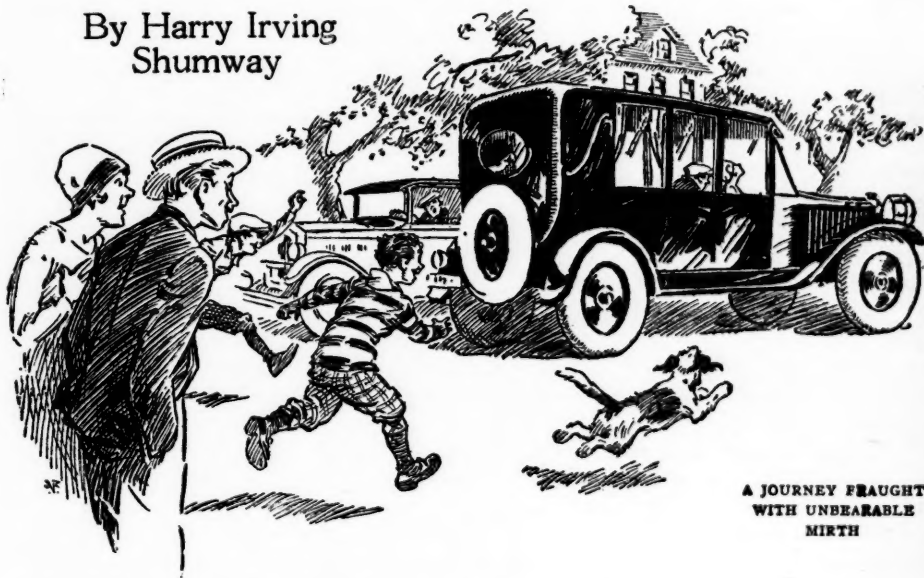
Life is so filled with terrors  
In nights that are black and drear—  
With the will to expunge the errors  
And a soul to beat down fear.

Olin Lyman



# It All Depends

By Harry Irving  
Shumway



A JOURNEY FRAUGHT  
WITH UNBEARABLE  
MIRTH

*Elmore Vinal's rash purchase of a big secondhand motor car results in startling experiences for himself and his family*



It was a car of parts—which doesn't mean that the parts were not mechanically amalgamated into a more or less perfect whole. Its vintage—1917. Its lineage—a genuine imported Pavia-Cellini. Its present status—to be sold by the Metropolis Used Car Company, as is, for eight hundred and seventy-five dollars.

The gifted salesman flipped his leg-horn hat back from his moist brow with a snap of his finger. He gazed awesomely, reverently, at the great black Pavia-Cellini with its imposing length of wheel base, its wealth of

nickel-plated gadgets on the walnut dash, its worn but once expensive velvet sumptuousness.

"Yes, sir, there is a car! Boy, when all is said and done, in the final analysis, so to speak, the Pavia-Cellini begins where all the other cars leave off. Get me? This is an *automobile*. There's only sixteen of 'em in the United States—three in this big burg!"

Elmore Vinal, the prospect—although he didn't realize himself as such—also gazed at it, with his mouth slightly open. He gingerly walked up to it, kicked one of its fat tires, and laughed nervously.

"I guess you're right. It's some

car, all right—I can see that; but what I had in mind was a small, cheap—”

“Some car!” breathed the salesman. “Say, listen, I’m gonna tell you something. I wouldn’t sell this car to everybody. There’s people I’ve turned down on this—people who were crazy to buy it. Why? Because I’m sentimental or something. I want to know the man that gets this car. He’s gotta be a feller that loves real machinery—a connersoor, see?”

“Yeah,” interrupted Mr. Vinal; “but, you see, what I wanted was a light family car—something inexpensive, with a small upkeep—”

“There you are! Glad you brought that up. You’d go buy some cheap bus, and you’d begin to dig right away for parts and adjustments; but how about the upkeep of a Pavia-Cellini? How about it?”

Mr. Vinal shook his head weakly and admitted that the “how about it” was beyond him. The salesman lowered his voice to a hoarse, impressive whisper.

“There isn’t any—practically isn’t any. Once a Pavia-Cellini is right, it ticks right on for years, like a full-jeweled watch. You don’t have to buy parts, because it never needs any.”

“But if you do—”

“Listen, Mr.—”

“Vinal—Elmore Vinal. I’m assistant treasurer with the Cuppy Jute Company.”

The salesman shook hands.

“Glad to know you. Now, Mr. Vinal, I’m not going to talk any more about this car. I’m just going to let you drive it.”

“Oh, my goodness, no!” protested Mr. Vinal. “I—I really—I’ve never driven a car much—I—”

“Then I’ll drive it. We’ll let the Pavia-Cellini speak for itself. Get right in! There’s one thing more I want to tell you before you step into this wonderful car. Listen—this car cost eighteen thousand dollars. Look at that upholstery—rich as a Gobelin

tapestry! Now get right in, Mr. Vinal.”

Mr. Vinal did. He would have been safer taking his first shot of hasheesh, but he didn’t know it. The greatest weapon of the automobile salesman is a ride.

The great engine throbbed and then roared like some mammoth beast just awakened. The salesman eased in the clutch, and Elmore Vinal had a sensation that he was being moved by some great, expensive force. The mundane world began slipping by him in an exhilarating blur.

His thoughts were dreadfully muddled. The very idea of being in a Pavia-Cellini went to his head like—like hard cider on a hot afternoon. Only sixteen of ’em in the United States—think of it!

What would Sophie say to this? Always there was that question. It popped up like a jinni that was ordained to pop up at Elmore Vinal at every important turn of his life. It would be wrong, of course. She wouldn’t understand—she never did.

The Pavia-Cellini slid to a majestic stop. They were out in the country on a wide boulevard. The salesman stood up.

“Change seats, Mr. Vinal. I’m going to let you drive.”

“Oh, no!” protested Elmore, panic-stricken. “I really couldn’t. I’m not familiar with cars, you see. Only driven a few miles. I—I—”

“That’s all right—I’m here. The Pavia-Cellini drives itself. She’s as easy as an old horse. Come on—just sit at the wheel. Ha, ha! Some wheel, hey? No toy hoop, that. Now step on the throttle. Just hear her speak to you. Music, eh? Well, let’s go. One, two, three—universal gear shift—release the clutch—yank her in toward you. Atta boy!”

This was the final touch preparatory to tobogganing on the dotted line. There are few things more irresistible than sitting at the helm of a car you

can't afford. The end was clearly in evidence. Mr. Vinal, on the return trip, knew that he was going to own a genuine imported Pavia-Cellini. He knew it in spite of the specter of Sophie, which frowned and seemed to sputter in the background.

"I'll take it," he explained. "I'll take it, if you'll give me driving lessons before I take it home. You see, I'm married, and they'll want to—"

"Absolutely, Mr. Vinal," beamed the salesman. "I'll give you all the lessons you need. Won't cost you a cent, and I'll bet a hat you can drive it home to-night."

"No, no—I couldn't; but if you will—"

"Step right into the office, Mr. Vinal. I'll give you a lesson as soon as you sign up. By George, I envy you! I'd like a Pavia-Cellini myself. You're darned lucky. Only two others, mind you, in this whole burg!"

In five lessons Mr. Vinal became proficient enough to keep his car going and be dimly conscious where both ends of the giant were during the turns; but in no way had he got over the fright that such a big piece of machinery gave him. He felt like the engineer of a locomotive mistakenly on the highway. Once in awhile he dared to look around, and was pleasantly exhilarated to observe the awed glances of the populace, from traffic cops down.

At home, while the lessons were going on, he was the object of a little suspicion. Sophie was no charlatan in her clairvoyance. She *knew*!

"There's something on your mind, Elmore Vinal," she said with compressed lips. "You're not going to lose your job?"

"Good Heavens, no! Didn't they give me a ten-dollar raise two months ago? No, there's nothing the matter at all. What makes you think so?"

"Then you're thinking of buying something," she went on, quite unconvinced. "I can see it in your manner. You're fidgety!"

"I'm not thinking of buying anything," retorted Mr. Vinal, truthfully. "Positively not. You're imagining things, Sophie."

"H-m! Maybe."

Sophie was always like that. Suspicious soul! Elmore wondered what kind of a squawk she would raise when he zoomed up to the door with the Pavia-Cellini. It would be interesting—but he preferred not to anticipate.

On the evening when he drove it home he was too busy with other emotions to wonder much about his wife's reactions. There had been three bad traffic jams, one a particularly vicious one at a crossing of diagonal streets. It seemed as if all the cars in the United States, including the fifteen other Pavia-Cellinis, were trying to get through. Mr. Vinal perspired in anguish. He wasn't nearly good enough at the wheel to negotiate rush hour traffic; but the gods who help babies, drunks, and new drivers saw him safely through, with nothing worse than a set of badly vibrating nerves.

He shut off the dual ignition with a flourish, just between the iris bed and the row of new lilacs, and wanted to collapse. Heads peered out through the windows, only to disappear and emerge with fluttering bodies around him and his object of art.

"I knew it!" snapped Mrs. Vinal. "I knew it all the time! I knew you were buying some fool thing! What on earth is it? Elmore Vinal, have you lost your senses?"

"Hold everything, dear," he mollified her. "This is a—*a* Pavia-Cellini."

He allowed it to sink in. He might just as well have told her that it was a Lepidoptera or a Habeas Corpus.

"My gosh, pa, but isn't it big?" exclaimed Peg, his youngest.

"A regular hack—including the railroad station," quoth Nan, his other.

Mrs. Vinal was speechless—momentarily. She would get her second wind soon. Just now she stared helplessly

at the long, threatening lines of the big bus.

"Folks," began Pa Vinal jocosely, sticking his head out of the window, "this, as I have said, is a real imported Pavia-Cellini. There are only sixteen of these babies in the whole United States, and only three in this man's town. This wagon cost eighteen thousand dollars—er—in its youth."

"And you sunk how much in it?" observed Ma Vinal biting.

"A mere eight hundred and seventy-five."

"When was it—born?"

Pa coughed.

"It's a late 1917—just niceiy worked in, as you might say."

"How much does it cost to run it?"

"Very economical—six miles to the gallon, but it can be leaned down."

"And the tires?"

"Very good rubber, so the salesman said."

"And you're a very good sucker!" exploded ma. "Of all the dumbheads at large, you're the dumbest, Elmore Vinal! You know very well it will cost a fortune to run that—that old herdic; and I won't ride an inch in such a relic. You knew better. You knew all the time. You lied to me. You said—"

But let us draw a thick, sound-proof curtain over this scene. Anybody—that is, almost anybody—who has ever walked down an aisle to music can fill in the words, if he wishes.

## II

"No, I don't care for a ride," sniffed Ma Vinal, two nights later. "When I see the people next door out in their spanking new Dolliver, I could cry!"

"Dolliver!" Pa gave a sniff of his own. "Seven hundred and thirty-five dollars F. O. B., and a hundred-and-eleven-inch wheel base—pah! Only two triggers on the dash—pah!"

"But it's *new*," she snapped back. "It's modern. It's not something that Benedict Arnold might have ridden in.

I couldn't hold my head up in this—this—"

"Pavia-Cellini."

"Oh, I know the name! I was trying to call it what it looked like. It's a sick elephant!"

Pa was nettled.

"It may be an elephant, but it ain't sick. It's a darned healthy car!"

"Well, it's got wrinkles just like an elephant, anyway. It's old and decrepit. I never could hold my head up in such an old wreck!"

So that was it. Ma was troubled with "society notions," as pa called them. Her actions were more or less strictly controlled by the question, "What will the best people think?" She had yearned for something better than a Dolliver. Her aspirations had even carried her up to the possibility of seeing herself in a Straight Eight Bagonia, with a chauffeur to match; and now this flea-bitten Dago car! A Pavia-Cellini! Bah! It was too bad.

The girls took it a little more philosophically. To youth a car is a car, especially if it is a large one. Particularly was Nan inclined to take it to her heart—figuratively, of course—after one of her friends had evinced more than a little surprise and awe. Iris Buzzell was the local high hat of Delphi.

"A new car, dear?" she murmured.

"One of the new Fords?"

Nan allowed her features to register just the right amount of boredom.

"No, old dear—a Pavia-Cellini," she replied, yawning slightly.

Iris reacted as if she had swallowed a shot of red pepper.

"Gracious! A—a what did you say?"

"A Pavia-Cellini, dear—a sedan. Mother wanted a Dolliver, and I suppose they're all right to run around in. They're so little you can park 'em on a dime; but dad wouldn't look at anything but a Pavia-Cellini."

Iris's family owned a Dolliver! Feline, what?



So Nan and pa went into a league and began learning the mechanical idiosyncrasies of the big brute.

"Darn these gadgets!" he would complain. "There's more whatnots on this dash than on the Spirit of St. Louis. I suppose this dingus is an altitude meter. What good is that?"

"It might help to register mother's feelings when she steps out in it—if she ever does."

Pa laughed and rubbed his forehead.

"I'm scared of pushing the wrong trigger. It might blow up."

"Why not send for a booklet?" advised Nan. "A car like this ought to have a guide or something to explain everything."

"A fine idea! Here's the address on the dash—'Pavia-Cellini Motor Car Company—United States office, Fifth Avenue, New York.' I'll write 'em."

"And while we're waiting, let's go along blind with it. You remember you learned bridge in the fire station long before Mr. Work ever told you how on the radio. It's probably old enough to know its onions, anyway."

So, while waiting for the booklet, they drove it every fine evening and made lovely trips of a Sunday. Sometimes Peg went along, but only when Peg's sheik, who owned a made-over bug with audacious legends on its hide, was otherwise engaged. Ma's eyes began to have a queer, hungry gleam whenever the trio—Pavia-Cellini, pa, and Nan—throbbed joyously out of the yard; but her mouth said:

"Never, never!"

The best New Year resolutions, however, seldom last longer than the 15th of January. Their lustiness is bound to flicker, grow dim, and finally flutter out. So it was with Ma Vinal. The happy trio was slowly wearing her down.

It was a proposed trip to Uncle Strabo Vinal's that snuffed out what little there was left of her resolve. Uncle Strabo was a great favorite of hers,

and he had the noblest vegetable garden in the county. It was late August, and corn, perhaps even lima beans, would be ripe. Ma watched the preparations with a dry mouth and the least suspicion of a quivering lip.

"I don't feel real well to-day," she observed. "The heat—"

Her voice drifted off. Pa was always sympathetic.

"No, Sophie, that's too bad—we won't go. I'd feel terrible, going and leaving you here with a headache."

Ma waved a gesture of resignation.

"No! You go ahead. You've planned to go, and Nan wants to. I'll stay here. I'll be all right."

"If you'd just come with us—" began pa. "If you'd get over the idea of—of—"

Ma sniffed, but there was little horse power in it. Her eyes drifted through the window, where the dull, black hulk loomed in the driveway. She said nothing.

"She really rides nice, ma—just as easy and soft! You'd love it, if you'd only try it once."

"I said I'd never set a foot in—in the—"

Pa flipped his new cap on his knee, then fitted it at a jaunty angle on his cocky head.

"Oh, come on, ma! We're all set to go, and Uncle Strabo will be mad as time if he doesn't see you. You know he's foolish about you."

Uncle Strabo knocked down the last barrier. Ma jumped up. Selfish—that's what she had been. That poor old man out in the lonely country, dying to see her, and she staying away just on account of a notion! She got her hat and her new coat.

It was again a case of letting the Pavia-Cellini speak for itself; and, unlike the famous Mr. Alden of Plymouth, it didn't hesitate to speak for itself. Aged though it might be, there was something in and about it that fairly exuded opulence, grandeur, the air of the thoroughbred.

Ma settled back in a seat that would have been fitting for a queen and relaxed in a mood of mixed emotions. Gracious, how long it was! Pa, at the wheel, seemed far away. How well he drove for an inexperienced driver! And it really did ride marvelously well. Lumps and holes in the road meant nothing to it.

There was another comforting thought—probably most people wouldn't know how old it really was. A new coat of paint would do wonders. Ma was beginning to have constructive thoughts.

It was on a charming old country road, some thirty-five miles out, that the Pavia-Cellini spoke again—spoke out of turn. Like a bolt from the blue, it suddenly changed its pleasant note and began to clank angrily. This was something new. Pa slowed down, glanced uneasily at Nan by his side, and seemed to be asking for knowledge.

"Sort of a minor key, old dear," said Nan. "The old Pavia-Cellini maybe has the colic. Better slow down and pat its tummy."

Pa shut off the ignition and drew up to one side.

"S' funny! What do you suppose has gone wrong?" he asked. "Sounds like—like fireworks."

"Don't ask me, pops." Then she brightened. "Why, the booklet! That sees all, knows all, tells all—every symptom and treatment. I put it in the pocket. Ma, reach in that pocket and give me a booklet you'll find there. Thanks!"

While Nan ran through the booklet, under the general department of ailments, Pa Vinal stepped on the starter again. It was a tough one, that starter. He had to stand up on it, and sometimes he had to use both feet. The motor roared obediently, but the explosive clanks were deafening.

"Stop it!" yelled Ma. "The old thing will blow up! I knew I shouldn't have come out in it!"

"Hold everything," interposed Nan. "Shut off that seventy-five, old dear, or I can't read the book. That's better. Now let's see. Lubrication troubles—heating—knocking. Now I ask you, would you call that a knock?"

"Seems bigger," thoughtfully answered Pa. "Too much volume for a knock. Look up explosions."

"Nothing here on explosions. Boiling—gear troubles. H-m! This book seems to have a lot of troubles, but not ours."

"Troubles!" snorted Ma. "Does it say anything about being lost a hundred miles from home? Troubles! I guess we've got troubles!"

"Well, it *will* go," observed Nan; "only that clank doesn't seem as if things were on the right wave length."

"Yes, it 'll go," agreed Pa. "We might be able to get home, even—"

"All right! For Heaven's sake, let's go back!" said Ma.

"Let's go, then," said Nan. "We can get the doctor after we get the patient comfortable."

Ma will never forget that ride home. The power was only slightly diminished, but that awful *clank, clank, clank* was with them all the way.

People turned around to stare at them. Other motorists heard them coming for blocks, and hastily removed themselves from the path of the loudly lamenting Pavia-Cellini. Boys hooted at them, and their whole return journey was fraught with ribaldry and unbearable mirth.

As they entered their home neighborhood, Mrs. Vinal's mien suggested a martyr being slowly charred at the stake. Never could she hold up her head again. This was too much!

In spite of its being one of the finest days of the season, everybody seemed to be home and out on their front porches. Pa had to change gears going up the hill they lived on, and the noise was multiplied sevenfold.

Ma staggered into the house, a figure of unutterable shame and dejection.

tion. This was the last straw! Nan and pa stayed with the—the body out in the driveway, allowing the chief mourner to have her troubles—alone.

The garage mechanic who called next day diagnosed the trouble with no difficulty. Nan had to listen to him, for pa was away.

"You say you drove this boiler thirty-five miles, and that connectin' rod all shot to—all shot?"

"Speak freely," said Nan. "We called it worse than that."

"Well, it's a wonder you've got a motor left! There's probably a whole bearin' all chewed up inside that crank case. A nice job! Shall I take it away and give it the works?"

Nan considered.

"All right! Take it away, and give it the works."

Pa called at the garage a week later to get his pet. The garage man glared at him.

"There's a baby to work on!" he said. "When they put that thing together, they meant it to stay together."

"It came from a country where they have earthquakes and volcanic eruptions," said pa.

"I believe it! Jake and me put in fifty-four hours on her, and the bearin' had to be sent for."

"It's a good car, isn't it?" said pa.

The garage man changed face.

"You bet your cotter pins it is—one of the best in the world; but if a flivver falls on top of you while you're workin' on it, it don't seem like a locomotive. Howsoever, she's O. K. now. The next time you hear a noise that ain't on the program, you stop and send for me!"

"Right-o!" said pa. "The bill is how much?"

"Eighty-five bucks. If the Pavia-Cellini factory had done it for you it'd 'a' been a couple o' hundred."

New life for the Pavia-Cellini! But ma would have no more of it. Once bitten, she was forever shy.

"Just because it went bad once

doesn't mean it 'll keep on doing it," explained pa. "The best of 'em get an indisposition at times."

"They don't yell about it like that one."

"It might never happen again."

"It never will—with me in it."

### III

It was some time later that Pa Vinal struck something in a newspaper that made him open his eyes. A writer had gathered automobile statistics from all over the State, and had some very interesting facts. Pa read aloud:

"Listen to this, ma! 'The most popular bird, automotively speaking, is the ubiquitous flivver. Out of nearly a million cars registered in this commonwealth, there are more than four hundred thousand of that make. At the other extreme is the rare and expensive Pavia-Cellini. Only sixteen of these cars are owned in the United States, three of them in the capital of our State. The aristocrat of the road has for its proud parents but three local families. Mrs. R. Sears Wimleigh, of Beacon Street, has a 1919 imperial sedan. Judge Albemarle R. Whitehouse drives a 1918 touring model, which is the pride of his judicial eye and heart. The third is owned by Mr. Elmore Vinal, of 276 Kennington Avenue—a 1917 sedan.'

"Well, ma, what d'you think of that?" gasped pa. "Ain't we just in the swim, though? Think of it—Mrs. Sears Wimleigh, Judge Albemarle Whitehouse, and us! Whe-e-e-e-e!"

Ma's expression was a study.

"Let me see that paper!" she snapped.

She read it carefully, several times. Mrs. R. Sears Wimleigh—Judge Albemarle Whitehouse! H-m! They were the cream of the élite. Why, local society couldn't make a move without the famous Mrs. Sears Wimleigh's approval; and Judge Whitehouse represented one of the oldest and most distinguished families in the State.

Ma's feelings were various. She felt all churned up—humiliated, somehow, when she might just as well have been exalted. Anyhow, Elmore Vinal had been responsible for it all, and she was vaguely angry with him.

One Saturday pa was invited to spend the afternoon at the Pequot Valley Country Club with the president of his company, Mr. Cuppy. Pa wasn't a member of any country club, but he did have a set of clubs, and he knew enough about golf to perform the rites of the game. Some day, when he was treasurer of the Cuppy Jute Company, he would take five hundred dollars and join. It was very nice of Mr. Cuppy to invite him out once in awhile.

"Pa," said Ma Vinal on Friday, "I want you to go into Houston Kemp's and buy yourself a pair of golf trousers, for to-morrow. Get some golf stockings, too—snappy ones like what the Prince of Wales wears."

Pa stared at her.

"I have golf pants now."

"Those things! They're terrible! They don't bag at all! You want the kind that seem as if your pants were falling down and yet not quite—"

"Ma!" almost shouted the shocked man.

"Well, you know what I mean—plus fours. You go ahead and get 'em. You can't play with Mr. Cuppy and his crowd with those horrid old pants that you've used for fishing, and even for painting the garage."

"Well, I suppose I'll have to."

"You're going to drive out?"

Pa glared at her.

"Do you think I'd take a trolley, in those trick pants and stockings? Of course I'll drive! Too bad you won't come along. Mr. Cuppy told me to bring you. There are always ladies there. They can't play on Saturday afternoons, unless they're professional women, and so they sit under striped umbrellas and drink lemonade and look pictorial—like Hollywood. Too bad you won't come!"

"Lemonade makes me sick."

"They have tea and ginger ale and sandwiches, too."

Ma did some thinking, and it didn't take her long to dig up some workable ideas.

"You needn't bother about those plus fours and stockings, Elmore."

Pa smiled and sighed in relief.

"I'll get 'em myself," ma went on. "You'd buy some awful things in the bargain basement. I'm going in town anyway, so I'll attend to it. There are some frocks I want to look at, and some shoes. Maybe I'll go out to the country club. I never go anywhere."

Pa smiled happily.

"In—in—"

"A taxi!" snapped ma. "If you can afford to drive something big enough to be on a railroad track, I guess I can take a taxi once in awhile."

The next day, about noontime, the Vinal home was like back stage at a dress rehearsal. Pa, from the waist down, looked like something that had been run through a prep school by mistake. His lower legs were incased in two-inch squares of bright red and green. At a point about where the lower calf began, all known anatomical lines suddenly ceased. Twin gray balloons snuffed out the danger and safety pattern below and rose like voluminous columns to a bright new leather belt. A new pale blue shirt with collar attached, set off by a green tie, completed the picture. It was almost good enough to hang in the Louvre.

Not only Ma Vinal, but Nan and Peg were also in the running. Nan said she would go along with pa, and Peg had elected to try the taxi with her mother.

There was just a wee bit of wistfulness in ma's face when the jazzy Mr. Vinal and his resplendent daughter throbbed out of the yard in the Pavia-Cellini. The big bus had been treated to a bath and a polish, and the trio looked pretty nice. Ma almost hated taxicabs at the moment.



"See you later!" shouted pa. "Go in anywhere and sit down. Sorry you're not coming with us!"

"Good-by, Elmore. Have a good time!"

Arriving at the clubhouse, pa ran his car into the circle reserved for parking. He reversed and eased the great beast up alongside another big machine. Then, as he reached over to shut off the ignition, he seemed suddenly stricken by a coma. He appeared unable to straighten up, and his head was pointed off to one side.

"What's wrong, pops?" asked Nan.

"Look there—beside us!"

Nan looked.

"Holy smoke! Another Pavia-Cellini! It's almost like ours, only it's a touring model. It's as old as ours, I'll bet. I wonder whose it is! It must be one of the other two."

"H-m! It's like old friends meeting in a foreign country. There's Mr. Cuppy waiting, Nan. I've got to go. Wait for your mother on the piazza. Good-by, dear."

"By, pops. Do your stuff. Now go out and make Walter Hagen ashamed of himself!"

#### IV

It was some three hours later when Nan reported to her mother, who had sought the shade of one of the cool piazzas, that her father's party was slowly toiling up the fairway of the eighteenth hole.

"I couldn't miss him, mumsy, even a quarter of a mile away. He looks so like mixed railroad signals with his go-and-stop stockings!"

Ma Vinal half reclined in a generous wicker chair, a tall glass of something with green leaves in it standing near by on a low table. Ma looked well, and she felt better. This atmosphere of wealth, and the consciousness that her own new rig was pretty nifty, had started a pleasant glow within her that couldn't be dimmed. She was in no hurry to leave.

"Nice here," she said.

Peg and Nan agreed.

"It's the darb," said Nan. "Wish pa would have a lot of luck soon, and I could join!"

"You could both join with the money he spends on that great ark of a car," suggested Mrs. Vinal.

"You've got to have a car, mumsy."

"H-m! Then why doesn't he get one, instead of an old wreck that eats its head off? Here he comes now."

Pa, moist and hot, waved a hand and disappeared into the lower realms of the clubhouse. Twenty minutes later he emerged, looking more comfortable, even debonair. Ma and the girls could see him from their chairs as he walked over to the Pavia-Cellini and threw his bag of clubs inside. Then he turned and spoke to somebody.

"Who's he talking to?" asked ma.

Nan's puckered brow seemed puzzled and amused, too.

"A man in the car next to ours," she said. "It's a Pavia-Cellini, too."

The trio watched and waited. Now the other man got out of his own car and came over to pa's machine. He was a tall, slender man, gray-haired, and distinguished looking even in his rather plain golfing togs. The two men talked, and talked some more. Then the stranger lifted the hood of pa's car and peered inside.

"Gracious, what on earth are they talking about?" inquired Ma Vinal.

"How should we know, dear?" observed Nan. "It seems to be connected with the—elephant. Maybe our elephant and the man's elephant are sisters under the skin. Who knows?"

Ma gasped.

"Why, the man is climbing into our—your father's car! How queer! He's starting it. Gracious, they're going away in it! They've gone! Well, what do you know about that? Do you suppose—"

"He's gone and left us flat? No, mumsy. He knows we're here, because he waved to us."

"Well, I never! It's queer, that's what it is!"

Ma fortified herself with her lemonade. She had time to consume it and order another before the car returned in a whirl of dust and noise. The distinguished looking stranger was still driving, and he brought it around with a practiced hand.

The two men talked some more. They seemed quite friendly now. They even shook hands, and finally, after more nods and pats on and at pa's Pavia-Cellini, the other man got into his own Pavia-Cellini and drove away. He waved to pa as he did so.

The question marks above the heads of the Vinal family were plainly visible in the air as pa strolled jauntily toward his brood. He sat down and ordered more lemonade. He pulled out an important looking cigar and carefully lighted it.

"My new friend gave it to me," he observed.

"Who is he?" inquired ma.

Pa pursed his lips and allowed a few rings of fragrant smoke to escape therefrom. He could be so deliberate and exasperating sometimes!

"A fellow named Whitehouse," he finally said.

Nan stared and ma blinked.

"You mean—" said Nan.

Pa grinned.

"Sure! He's one of us three who own Pavia-Cellinis in this man's burg—Judge Albemarle Whitehouse. He has a 1918 touring car. He wanted me to drive it, but I knew you must be in a hurry after waiting so long."

"Why didn't you, pa?" stuttered ma. "We—we weren't in any hurry."

Pa blew more rings.

"Oh, well, there'll be another opportunity. He's invited me to play golf with him soon. We sort of got acquainted over that car. Seems he's an awful nut on automobiles, especially Pavia-Cellinis. He has half a dozen other cars of different makes, but that 1918 Pavia-Cellini is the apple of his

eye. They changed engines in 1917, and he's crazy to own one like mine."

Ma stared at her husband. He seemed a new sort of husband, somehow.

"He even offered to buy it. He apologized and all that, but he said he'd love to own one with that model engine—the one I have. I said—"

That awful man blew some more rings. Ma choked and shivered.

"Elmore Vinal, you didn't say you'd sell it to him, did you?"

"I'll say I didn't! I'll take him riding or let him drive it, some time. He was quite childish and happy when I said he could; but I wouldn't sell that Pavia-Cellini for anything!"

"I should say not!" observed ma.

Deep down inside of him Elmore Vinal had the nicest, meanest sensation of "I told you so" he had ever known; but he said not a word. A wise man, pa! Probably he would be treasurer of his company before long.

He got up and looked at his watch.

"We'd better be moving," he said.

"Come on, Nan!"

He looked inquiringly at ma. Ma got up. The episodes at Yorktown and Appomattox were not more complete.

"Let's drive over to Essex," she suggested. "I heard somebody say the road was beautiful. We can get a bite at some place. No hurry to go home. I feel like—like having a—good long ride."

Pa quit blowing rings. The cigar was clenched between lips tightly shut, as if he might be trying to keep back some bubbling emotion.

He escorted ma to the Pavia-Cellini, flung open the door, and handed her in as Sir Walter himself might have done. Peg sat with her mother, but Nan snuggled up to her father in the front seat.

"Did you win, pops?" she asked, as the engine roared into life.

"Look me over, kid!" grinned pa.

And Nan knew exactly what he meant.

# The Yellow Clawhammer

By Stanley Olmsted

*A chapter from the experiences of Mrs. Winnie Vickey, owner of the Vickey House, collector of birds, and connoisseur of men*



HAD IT BEEN A KIND OF AWAKENING,  
OR ONLY A DREAM?



RS. VICKEY, of "The Vickey House—Mrs. Winnie Vickey, Founder, Owner, and Manager," sauntered into the carpetless room of her establishment that just at present happened to be the "office."

Mrs. Vickey was always building on

new rooms to her hotel, so its solar plexus moved about. Through the doorway behind her various extensions were visible, inclosing three sides of an oblong court, which at its farther end opened upon the sidewalk of River Street. Ample porches surrounded the court upstairs and down. Along the weatherboarding, downstairs, were

stuffed birds set on brackets—large birds and small birds, from eagles to orioles. All of them had undergone Gethsemane as live captives in the court, and had died there.

Mrs. Winnie Vickey undulated as she went, with a certain massive coquetry. Once, if the gossip of the county seat was to be trusted, she had been a siren. To her thin-lipped face, oddly well boned seeing how vast she was, a touch of smugness imparted dignity.

She was the richest woman in the county. Thirty-five years ago she had started taking boarders in a single frame house, now submerged among successive extensions, and had called her venture "The Drummer's Home." She wore a red rose in her inkily raven hair. Her black taffeta was voluminous, and it rustled. Fashions might come and go as they shrank and shortened, but nothing would ever seem elegant to Mrs. Vickey that did not trail and rustle.

Breakfast, which must be eaten at seven o'clock if eaten at all, had not yet been announced by the huge bell whose clang penetrated the farthest reaches of the town like a fire gong. The office was therefore empty save for the presence of young Mrs. Lamison, who served Mrs. Vickey as general factotum.

"Cora, honey," said Mrs. Vickey, addressing Mrs. Lamison, "I've just bought a live yellow clawhammer from a country boy down from the mountains. I reckon the poor lad must have got up long before daylight and tracked it down here, fifteen or twenty miles. He wanted a quarter for the bird, but I offered him a dime, and he was glad to get it."

Cora sat on one of the high backless stools behind a counter of the type used in village stores. She was a widow. She had hooked her feet under the counter to give herself a relaxed position, and she was stitching kewpies in rainbow outline into a suit of rompers

for her four-year-old son.

"A live clawhammer?" Mrs. Lamison's North Georgia drawl had a dying fall to it, with a note as if at any moment she might burst out crying. "They're mighty pretty things. Pore little bird! Trapped, I reckon. Where did you put it?"

"I have it in the cage where I kept the crimson cardinal. You'd almost think it was human, the way it presses its wings and body flat upright against the wires and hangs there as still as something crucified. It pays no more attention to food or anything than if it was heartbroke."

"What are you going to do with it, Mrs. Vickey? Likely it 'll just die. They all do, don't they?"

"Then I'll have it stuffed." Cheerfully Mrs. Vickey dismissed the subject. She consulted the register, newly purchased this year, but already inked, soiled, and decrepit. "Last night was the first night I haven't set up for the late train in years. Just four men and a married couple, I see. The season's slow beginning. What do they look like, Cora?"

"They look all kinds of different ways," half sobbed Cora placidly, stitching away. "Two of the men ain't drummers, I think—more like Atlanta men, I'd say, though they signed up from Knoxville. They were dressed nice and feeling good—mountain dew, I reckon."

Mrs. Vickey was scrutinizing the registry page.

"Corn liquor, sure! You can mighty nigh always recognize it when ink's been upset like this!"

She referred to a black soaking, still moistish, in the general shape of an anvil, with a smeared trail curling across the ruled lines. Spilled ink was a frequent casualty on her books. No use crying about it!

"That wasn't done by them, though—not by them two men."

Mrs. Lamison's toneless drawl and the look as of bruises about her eyes



showed that she was tired. Her duties varied from giving Mrs. Vickey her water wave, and altering her frocks, to rousing the railroad men for their five-o'clock coffee and cereal. She was slight almost to emaciation.

"You're getting plumb spindling, honey." It was Mrs. Vickey's way often to change the subject. "But don't worry. At my age you'll be as big as I am. I used to be the delicatest-looking little thing in Tobin County."

"I reckon," assented Cora, and her dying fall, being too frequent, could not be called a sigh.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to have you always around, and to quit losing so much sleep myself. For thirty-three years, before you came, I was an under-sleeping woman. Which one of them upset the ink?"

"The little married woman," replied Cora.

"H-m!" reflected Mrs. Vickey. "A married woman, and spilling ink!"

"There wasn't nothing wrong with her, Mrs. Vickey—I'm sure of that, indeed I am—except nervousness. She hardly looked more than a child, and he was a big, strapping man, up in his thirties, I'd say. He made her sign for herself. She was dressed up in nice new clothes, but she acted scared, as if she'd just come down out of Heifer's Tail or Snowbird Mountains."

"H-m!" cogitated Mrs. Vickey. "We must look into that. No more goings on in my hotel! That's why I did away with that staircase up from the front entrance. No more easy ways in and out for late gentlemen callers, thank you! There's just one way to get upstairs left on the place, and it's right beside my bedroom door, and I sleep light!"

Mrs. Vickey reexamined the signatures individually made by Mr. and Mrs. Hardman.

"Ever since they arrested that poor runaway schoolboy with his girl, last year, as a white slaver, I've been scared

of freak couples. There goes old Ned with his breakfast bell! Better rush and eat, Cora, before things get busy around here. Likely a lot more 'll come in this morning, being as it's court week. Some may come in their cars. You can't calculate business from train times any more."

## II

In the oblong court of the Vickey House a square of concrete had been laid for dancing. Mrs. Vickey had had taste enough to retain strips of grass around it, much beaten and trodden, and a few flowering shrubs, frayed and neglected. There were swing seats and an old chain pump, though long ago the ambitious village had put in a municipal water system.

The cage that had once imprisoned a crimson cardinal—now stuffed and mounted—was double wired, because of the cats. Mrs. Vickey had set it on a splint-bottom chair in the middle of the concrete, where the sun would pour hottest at midday. Food in plenty lay, ignored on the floor of the cage.

The yellow clawhammer—to use the local name of a bird known in other regions as a flicker or golden-winged woodpecker—hung with its feathered breast pressed against the wires, its wings outstretched like something glued. A wild animate thing from the mountain woodlands that circled Tobin, it hung so still that life could be detected only by a nearly imperceptible shiver running now and then through its body, a faint agonized twitching of plumage as rich and dainty as the fantasy of some Spanish artist.

Mrs. Lamison, having breakfasted, stood before the cage, gazing down.

"Pore little thing! Pore little thing!" she crooned, unconsciously chanting aloud.

She was tempted to take matters into her own hand and set the sufferer free. Just a quick stooping, unseen of any one, the porches being deserted; just a push of the hand sliding open the aper-

ture in the cage, and the yellow claw-hammer, now so tortured and degraded, would become on the instant a glorified creature, a disembodied spirit, a flash of gold against the sky.

She was tempted, but her courage was not quite equal to the risk. There was her little boy to support, and she knew Mrs. Vickey. There had once been an outcast mountain girl to whom Mrs. Vickey had given employment, tolerating the fatherless baby the girl had brought with her. Tobin called Mrs. Vickey kind-hearted. This unlucky servant had gone out after dark and set loose a tanager bought alive, that afternoon, by Mrs. Vickey.

Cora Lamison remembered the scene that had followed—the inquiry—the inquisition—the girl ejected with her baby in the night.

No, she had not the courage; but it would be beautiful to watch the captive bird soar away toward those swimming jasper walls!

Mrs. Lamison recalled absently that the married couple had not appeared at the breakfast table. As it was court week, there had been a lot of transients storming the office and signing for breakfast after old black Ned had rung the bell. Cora had jumped up to look after them, gulping down her coffee, leaving barely touched her hot biscuit and fried chicken.

Eventually Mrs. Vickey had relieved her, assigning rooms in person to such eleventh-hour guests as wanted them. Mrs. Vickey had earned the right to take things easy, but she still enjoyed such excitements. There were always new men, and different men, not all drummers; new women, too, some palpably all right, some problematical. Mrs. Vickey had learned how to deal with the problematical women.

Cora raised her eyes, which had been fixed on the cage. Behind her, like one conjured, though surely not from the concrete, stood the little married woman—the frightened little thing,

hardly more than a child, who had spilled ink in struggling to write her own name at her husband's command.

"Why, good morning, Mrs. Hardman! We missed you and Mr. Hardman at breakfast."

The bride—Mrs. Lamison's keen eyes never doubted that she was a bride—had shrunk back when Cora first looked up. Now she moved closer, like one overcoming her terror in her hunger for friendliness.

"He don't seem to want none, ma'am," she said. "Seems like he jist wants to sleep. He fell asleep with his clothes on, and ain't waked up yet."

"I reckon that's because he sits up late. I thought I heard his voice with them four men's when I passed one of their rooms early this morning. It sounded like a game of cards. Men like to sit up late sometimes, playing cards."

The girl made no reply. She was gazing down at the bird.

"You ain't been married very long?" Cora asked.

The girl's body twitched, shrinking anew. Then she seemed to gain confidence, as the older woman's arm went about her shoulder.

"Late yesterday, ma'am. We had to go as far as Stoversville in a buggy. He hired a Ford from there to the railroad and caught the train. He had me get my hair bobbed in Stoversville. It feels kind o' strange like."

The girl's voice died out, and her wan paleness deepened to pink.

"Are you just up, Mrs. Hardman?" Cora said sympathetically. "It ain't the rules, but I don't believe Mrs. Vickey would mind if I laid out some fried chicken and biscuits for you."

"Thank you kindly, but seems like I've got no appetite to eat," replied the girl. "I've been outdoors a plumb hour, I reckon. I walked down as far as the Wancheecha River. It looked mighty pretty, with the dogwood out along the banks. The head of Wancheecha ain't five mile away from

where I lived and was born. It's just a little spring under a rock, like any other spring. A person wouldn't hardly believe it, seeing that river all spread out and roaring!"

"The Wancheecha's a mighty pretty river; but it gets muddier and muddier every year, seems like."

"That's a clawhammer, ain't it? Pore little thing!"

"By nighttime," sighed Cora, "it'll be dead. It'll just loosen its wings with a kind of easy shudder and lie still on the bottom of the cage. They always do. The eagle lived longest. Mrs. Vickey had a big dry goods box fixed up for the eagle, with iron bars like the county jail. It was mighty ill-tempered. We were all afraid of it; but it died in two or three weeks."

Without warning two hands clutched toward her, and Mrs. Hardman burst into a torrent of sobbing, burying her newly bobbed flaxen head on Cora's thin breast.

"Now, now!" comforted Mrs. Lamison, looking about anxiously. "It's lucky the porches keep empty. Come with me quick, child—don't let anybody see you carrying on like this. There won't be nobody in the parlor this early. Mrs. Vickey'll be looking for me soon, but she'll look everywhere first except the parlor."

Supporting the collapsing girl, all but carrying her, with an energy amazing in one so slight, Mrs. Lamison whisked her out of sight around the corner of the nearest extension. Luck was still with them, for the stairless front hall was deserted, the star bedroom across from the parlor was locked and empty. Guests came and went by way of the court and the porches, as a rule, especially since the banishment of the front stairway.

One entire side of the hotel was almost blind. All its windows, except the two in the star bedroom, had been boarded up, in preparation for the next extension. Those two looked out upon a hillside sloping toward the river,

thickly grown with old apple trees, now all but shorn of the petals which, like white butterflies, had had their day.

Unlike most of the rooms in the house, the parlor was carpeted in a pattern of huge roses lumpily padded, smelling of mold. Crayon enlargements of photographs looked down from every wall—Mrs. Vickey's relatives, at every age from childhood to bearded senility; her staring infants, now grown to manhood or womanhood.

"It's the most sound-proof room in the hotel," comforted Mrs. Lamison; "but do try to keep down your sobbing, honey. Somebody might come here and find us. Stop crying and talk your heart out to me, if you want to."

### III

BAWN MADDOX lay where the dogwood and laurel were thickest along the banks of the Wancheecha. He slept. To youth comes the gift of sleep, even when in the heart there is a hurt that seems beyond all healing.

Bawn had snared the yellow clawhammer for a purpose. That had been yesterday morning, and now a new day was appearing in the motley of early Maytime. The trudged trail, the long trail, miles upon miles into this big town in an adjoining county, was behind him now.

He slept the stertorous sleep that is conscious of itself, that holds the sleeper like a vise. Sleep limed him as he had limed the clawhammer, and it held him powerless, as if gripping his snared feet against the frantic beating of wings in his heart.

Had it been a kind of awakening, or only a dream? Dogwood boughs, bending low to waters, dipping their white blooms to bubbly shallows where lips of water touched lips of petal—surely they had parted above him! Surely little Martha Dalton's face had looked down at him with eyes full of pain! And then those fading eyes had spoken, saying wordlessly:

"Aye, I still love ye, Bawn—I shain't never love nobody else; but it's too late now, Bawn—too late!"

A glimmer of a face, white on white of dogwood boughs, flaxen-ringed like the pictures of angels in the illustrated Bible! For such a glimpse he had tramped down from a cabin nestled in the deepest cove of the Snowbird Range.

He had struggled as he slept by the river. It must have been only a vision, else surely she must have felt his desperate wrestling, touching him to some merciful release with stroking fingers of compassion. He had moaned, striving to cast off the fetters of sleep, knowing that the heave of his throat was soundless, stifled with dust:

"Marthy! Oh, Marthy, don't go! I jist come down to get one last sight of ye like this, if I could—to say another last good-by to ye if I could! Oh, stay, stay!"

Heaving on fetters of sleep, the vision had dimmed, had faded, was gone. With a mighty wrench, hurling him asunder, he cast off the final shackles and sat upright on the mosses, rubbing his eyes. Dogwood blooms dipped and touched their white leaves to the water. To eyes freed at last, all looked commonplace, like every day. That pale, sad face peering through the boughs—just an ordinary dream!

He sat erect, low boughs brushing his cheek—a gray-eyed lad, tow-headed, with eyes set wide. He wore a new blue denim shirt fresh from a Stoversville store where Martha had bought her wedding dress, and new store shoes that had hurt him—all his Sunday best for a weekday morning in the wonderful town of Tobin, where there were railroads. Stoversville, his own county seat, had no railroads.

The sun was not yet high. He might still get his final glimpse of Martha. Could he make opportunity for one last word with her before the noon train carried her off and away?

"Marthy, there was a report got

started around Stoversville, after that feller left with you. If he don't turn out all right, jist come back to me! It won't matter none—it won't matter none to me!"

Would such speech be possible, caged in as she was, in the fine outspreading of gables that they called the Vickey House?

It was all in the hands of the Lord, as the preacher would have said; or perhaps it was just plain fate.

"Seems like the Lord don't mix in as much as he ought to, sometimes," Bawn thought.

He was determined to look upon her again, if he could. Somehow, some way, the Lord mixing in to help or not, her eyes should meet his before she went away for good.

Incongruously, Bawn thought of the yellow clawhammer. Poor little thing! He had caught it with bird lime, because there must be some reason for presenting himself at the Vickey House to size up with his own eyes old Mrs. Vickey, rich, famous, formidable. There had to be something that would not arouse suspicion; for she was there—he knew Martha was there.

He had brought down the yellow clawhammer in a pasteboard box, softly lined with cotton and drilled with tiny air holes. When they couldn't see out, they didn't try so hard to get out. He had sold the bird to Mrs. Vickey in person, letting her drive down his price as much as she liked. Then he had walked along the street and down a hill, and had crossed the low-lying meadows to the Wancheecha, at a point where the river bank was thickly grown. He was killing time until the breakfast hour, when folks would be up and about the hotel, and he could linger around to watch for Martha, to wait for Martha.

There was nothing much he could do, of course. Her people had pestered her into marrying a man—an old man, in Bawn's eyes—who had played the magnificent, paying off a mortgage



for them and saving their farm. It wasn't much of a farm, at that. Martha's people never could make it pay; and they had practically sold their daughter to a stranger, without knowing a thing about him except that he paid five hundred dollars to save their one-horse farm. The girl had at last nodded a stricken head, when they kept on pestering her about her obligations to the mother who bore her, the daddy who raised her, the fine rich stranger who had saved their all!

Bawn crossed the flat meadows back to the road and walked up the hill toward the town. Where it eased its climb to become populous, the road took on the name of River Street, and looked grand with a ribbon of concrete decking its middle. A sidewalk, stippled to look like stone, ran past the Vickey House. You could step from the sidewalk into the court and upon the downstairs porches, which were nearly level with the ground, and un-railed.

Bawn's thoughts were trailing back to another victim, his own guilt this time—that poor little clawhammer! It was a mean and cruel thing to do to a little wild bird.

He had heard that Mrs. Vickey was kind-hearted, and had believed that she would buy it only to let it loose; but he knew better now. If only he himself could set it free! He would give anything he ever hoped to win in an empty world to be able to set it free!

#### IV

"CORR," said Mrs. Vickey, "it's past ten o'clock, and I haven't set eyes on that married couple yet. They sleep mighty late. I don't like the looks of it!"

Cora was back behind the counter. She was stitching kewpies into sky-blue rompers, her feet hooked in a rung of the backless stool.

The office had been thronged with men, Mrs. Vickey in their midst, holding forth with the spirit of a hostess

at a house party. She tickled them with the blandishments of flattery, the animation of her type of raillery. Each man had the feeling that his particular presence in the hotel that day was Mrs. Vickey's special ecstasy. Such for-gatherings, in office or on porch, were the landlady's supreme moments. In them she lived life renewed, vitalized mirages, days now gone that had been more colorful and more adventurous than the present.

Now the men had all gone on their various ways, and the office was empty—for Mrs. Vickey.

"I don't like the looks of it," she repeated.

Cora stirred uneasily.

"There was a card game, I think. Them five men had got acquainted on the train. Plenty of mountain dew, too, I reckon."

"Everybody is down but that pair. Those two drummers were in the game, but they showed up at breakfast. They joked about the way they'd lost, and checked out right afterward."

"Nothing mysterious about *them*," sighed Cora. "They were just ordinary drummers."

"The other two men you spoke of came down a few minutes ago. They passed my room down the stairs, and I stepped out and introduced myself. Quite elegant men, and polite. They apologized so nicely about missing my nice breakfast. They'd been over in Stoversville yesterday, and they ran a race in a Ford to catch the train. You're right—they met the two drummers on the train, and Mr. and Mrs. Hardman. They sent Mrs. Hardman in to bed and got up a little fivesome. Nice, gentlemanly men they were. It was actually hard to have to tell them I don't permit drinking or gambling, and they mustn't do it any more. They apologized again. Charming men! Like Atlanta, you said? I'd say New York."

Cora prayed in her heart that Mrs. Vickey might go on being loquacious.

It made more time. More and more time, all her being supplicated!

"You do know human nature, Mrs. Vickey."

"I know *men*, Cora. Those two gentlemen are no more from Atlanta than I am. They're New Yorkers all over."

"Atlanta's a little New York," sighed Cora, to make talk.

"They're New Yorkers." Mrs. Vickey settled it, then and there. "I felt just in the mood to sit with 'em on the porch and make 'em feel at home, but they headed straight for the courthouse. Now what business can they have at the courthouse?"

"You never can tell," half sobbed Cora.

More and more time, please, dear Lord! Each minute was that much gain. There were miracles—Cora knew it now. Wasn't it a miracle that nobody had noticed that little mountain girl? So shrinking and shy at first, then so wild heartbroken and crucified! Martha Dalton—before yesterday.

Yes, it was a miracle. Cora had heard all, unsought of Mrs. Vickey in her gayety and preoccupation.

"Quick!" she had faltered. "Oh, quick!" She had whisked little Martha across the hallway, flashing her keys, unlocking a closed door. "Quick, honey—climb out that window—run down through that orchard—it 'll cover you nearly down to the river. Nobody 'll see you. If the lad's asleep on the bank, like you say, you'll find him still there; but don't come back—don't come back! You're not yet that old feller's wife, even if the preacher's done spoke the words! The Lord has saved you—he got drunk and he's still asleep, and the marriage can be undone. Wake up that boy by the river and fly with him back to your mountains. Keep always in the woods—don't even risk the trails. Stay by that boy, whoever he is, preacher's words or none! *Don't* falter and hesitate like this!"

She had all but resorted to force, pushing the wide-eyed child, half lifting her, out through one of the two windows that were not yet boarded, in the star bedroom.

Cora had stood by the window for long seconds that seemed hours, watching Martha's trembling body, wearied and distracted, gather itself together; watching the girl's feet gather speed and take on lightness, until she ran, fleet as the wind, aerial as the wings of a bird, vanishing downhill under the old apple trees.

It was half past ten o'clock.

"There's something irregular," persisted Mrs. Vickey. "I'm going upstairs to wake them up. I want to take a once-over of my own at that woman."

Cora gripped her arm feverishly.

"No, no, Mrs. Vickey—don't disturb her. The little thing's a bride. Probably she couldn't sleep none, with her man off somewhere playing poker with strangers. She'll be trying to make up some rest—"

"Well, she'll make up no more! I'm going right up there now. No goings on in *my* house!" At that exact moment Mrs. Vickey's attention was distracted. "Well, I'll say! If there ain't that country boy again, standing like somebody whipped in front of the clawhammer he sold me!"

Yet a bit more time! Cora peered out upon the court.

"He looks mighty harmless, Mrs. Vickey. Maybe the clawhammer was his pet, and he feels bad over parting from it."

Mrs. Vickey set straight the register, which Cora, darting up to grip her arm, had brushed askew.

"He's been hanging around all morning, darting behind corners like a Cherokee Indian whenever he saw me coming." She scraped a fly speck from a window pane with a finger nail. "Now for a look at the bride!" she announced, turning to go.

"Please don't disturb her yet, Mrs. Vickey. I wouldn't—honest!"

"There's something in the air this morning, Cora. I don't like the way you carry on like a chicken with its head cut off, just because I want to rouse up Mr. and Mrs. Hardman. I don't like the way that mountain boy acts. He must be simple-minded. *O-oh—look there!*" With a little scream Mrs. Vickey was darting out through the door. "*O-oh! Hey, boy, what are you up to?*"

An instant earlier the lad had suddenly seemed as one glorified, Cora thought. His hands were held out and upward before him, his uplifted eyes gazed out in rapture; but now, like some wild thing of the woods, startled, pricking up his ears at some nameless warning, he poised, quivering. Then, bending low, he hurled himself forward. Swift like an antelope, with charging head, he bounded through shrubs, cleared swinging seats, rounded the obstructing pump with its tub, and ruthlessly trampled Mrs. Vickey's rosebushes, making for River Street and escape.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" Mrs. Vickey shrilled her alarm, as penetrating as the gong that summoned strangers throughout all Tobin to her famous meals. "Mercy, Cora, he's let loose the clawhammer! He's set free that clawhammer he sold me for good money! Stop, thief! Stop, thief!"

Like something winged, the culprit would have been away and gone—but it was not to be. The narrow sidewalk, stippled to look like stone, was sharp-edged up from the ground. A new shoe that had hurt through fifteen or twenty miles, steeply up, stonily down, caught in the beveling of knife-like cement. He tripped. He fell.

Old black Ned, powerful as an ox, had been the first to rally to his mistress's summons. He caught the boy's blue denim shirt, jerked him standing, and clamped two enormous hands, pinioning the miscreant's arms. His cap-

tive twisted, tore with fettered hands, and fought desperately, butting with his head. Then he went very white. He kneeled limply. Old Ned might have been holding a raw image, scantily stuffed, disheveled.

"He must 'a' done broke his ankle or sumpun," panted old Ned; "but I done ketch him! I done ketch him, Mrs. Vickey!"

Over any special service old Ned invariably went boastful.

"It was just plain stealing, after taking my money! This sort of thing's got to stop around here. I let that girl off easy when she set loose my tanager. Carry him inside, Ned, and lay him on my bed. We'll have the doctor in to look after his ankle. Go get some cold water and arnica and bandages. Go get the constable, too. As soon as the doctor fixes him comfortable—if he's hurt at all—to the jail he goes. I'm getting tired of all these goings on around my hotel!"

As for Cora, she had resumed her place behind the counter. Placidly she stitched rainbow kewpies, but in her was a wild exultation. Mrs. Vickey had forgotten Mr. and Mrs. Hardman. They were clean gone from her mind.

The girl would be far away now, with her boy—her sweetheart, whoever he might be. He must have followed her, hiding on the train and sleeping by the river, where she had found him, and, having no courage of her own, been about to go away without speech or good-by. Cora Lamison had planted that courage—she, who had not dared to slip her hand under paltry wires and set free a wild bird!

Her heart went with those two children, off and away over the wooded hills that uplifted higher, ever higher, toward the clouds and the peaks of Snowbird. If only the girl's courage would last, her resolution stay unspent! She had looked so worn out, so tired and uncertain—poor little thing!

Another realization shot through Mrs. Lamison. The clawhammer—

that, too, was free and widely soaring, like little Martha and her sweetheart!

Let happen what would, now—all was well with Cora. She looked no farther than this miracle moment, packed with courage and love of liberty, alive with the soaring of wings!

## V

It was a quarter past twelve—nearly dinner time at the Vickey House. The noon train had come and gone.

"It's not a break but a twisting sprain—painful, I reckon, but not serious," the doctor said to Mrs. Vickey. "I wouldn't be too hard on the lad. He seems feverish."

"I'll see that he gets every comfort till he's better," assured Mrs. Vickey. "I never could stand to see any living thing suffering, no matter how low-down mean it was."

The town constable was hesitating.

"I reckon it's a misdemeanor of some kind, but it don't seem exactly thievin'. I never had no case like it before."

"I reckon he's been punished enough," said Mrs. Vickey. "It does make me mad, though. I hadn't a single clawhammer in all my collection of mountain birds!"

Their consultation was beside Mrs. Vickey's own bed. Bawn Maddox lay on the spotless counterpane. He did not move or seem to hear. He looked out with unduly bright eyes, plangent and resigned, unseeing. The noon train was gone! His eyelids closed wearily.

There was a light and timid rap on Mrs. Vickey's closed door. The constable flung it open.

She stood there, cowering, abject—a girl whom Mrs. Vickey could not identify. Her new dress had been torn by brambles, her feet were tottering.

"I couldn't find him," she said. Neither Mrs. Vickey nor the doctor nor the constable could fathom her meaning. "I looked and looked, roaming the hills toward home, but he was gone. I've come back. I'm a married

woman. I reckon I hadn't no right to run away, after the preacher—"

The words went dead on her lips. These were all strangers, not knowing, not understanding.

"Where is Mrs. Lamison?" she managed to ask.

The three stood before her, screening the bed. Bawn Maddox moaned like one wrestling to cast off sleep. What—Martha's voice? If this dream was real, he wouldn't be able to rouse himself in time!

The constable reached for the girl's hand like a father.

"You must be Marthy Dalton, of Snowbird?" he said. "If you're re-ferrin' to that male critter that calls himself Mr. Hardman—well, don't take it too hard, honey, but he's in the jail. He's wanted in New York for various devilments, includin' a string of bigamies. Them two fellers that come down to get him gave him his rope last night, and was amused to find card sharpin' among his little accomplishments. They let him sleep late this mornin'—the sound sleep of their good liquor, bought in his honor. They wasn't worried, except that they padlocked his door, findin' Mrs. Hardman had stepped out while he snored. Their idea was to spare the young woman as much shock as possible. They felt sorry for her, and they wanted to make sure they had the right man."

It is doubtful if Martha even heard. She had caught sight of Bawn's face on the pillow, and of his arms groping out to her, like one struggling to cast off the numbness of fetters.

"The clawhammer got what was coming to it!" jested Mrs. Vickey, in high spirits, with a tableful of men guests at dinner. "It was too weak to fly far, after its first spurt. The cat brought it back to me, as a particular attention, only a few minutes ago. It was too soiled and torn up by then to be of any use, so I just thanked the cat and let her keep it!"





# Face

*Canlon, whom the Chinese called K'ang, explains a subtlety that disarmed a hundred thousand men*

By Thomas Jeffries Betts



HE sat on the Peking Hotel roof, where the heat had driven us after the diplomat's party. The merits of a soft and tepid breeze outweighed there the glare of the lights, the shuffling of the dancers and the solemn rendition of American jazz by the sad-faced Russian band.

Crowding close around us was the night, in which the rays of the stars and of the occasional street lamps seemed so many impertinences. Of the city itself, there was hardly a trace,

no thunder of traffic, no glow of illumination. It was eleven o'clock, and the Peking of a million Chinese had gone to bed.

There were eight of us in the party, but only two counted: the visiting authoress, who was the guest of honor, and Canlon, heavy, pop-eyed, hard-gazing Canlon, versed in the lore of China, long involved in the mists of politics and intrigue, trusted friend of a host of militarists and statesmen, sometime official adviser to all sorts and conditions of local and national administrations.

The visiting authoress had descended on the diplomat, eager to see and hear; and the latter, ever efficient, had responded magnificently by purveying Canlon for her delectation. Now, having dined us fastidiously at the legation, and installed us in the coolest spot on the roof, the diplomat sought the conversational element that would bring us into the unity he desired.

"Do you know," he remarked, "what the *T'ing-ch'ai*—that's our Chinese factotum, Miss Austin—told me this morning? It seems that in the heat yesterday there was a very swagger old-style Chinese wedding. They wadded the bride into her ceremonial robes, put her into a red sedan chair that was virtually air-tight, and carried her from Hatamen Street away over by Pingtzen. This was all at blazing noon, and it took an hour and a half to get there. When they arrived she was dead; smothered, perhaps, perhaps heat stroke. *T'ing-ch'ai* says it happens once or twice a year."

"Barbarous!" put in the inevitable somebody. "But remember that the Chinese are barbarians."

"It's face-pidgin, the desire for appearances," spoke up Walters. "It's the curse of China. It hamstring you at every turn. Business, politics, social relationships, it's all the same. Not what's to be done, but how it will appear, both finished and in the doing. Face!"

Canlon raised his chin from its nest of flesh and looked at Walters steadily and incuriously.

"I think that's an incomplete statement," he said. "What you call 'face-pidgin' is the practice by the Chinese of a virtue known as *Li*, very inadequately translated by us as 'propriety.' They feel that the manner of doing is just as important as the actual accomplishment. We sense the same thing, but not so strongly. The Prince of Wales must use a silver trowel when he lays cornerstones. Bishops don't officiate in overalls, do they?"

He paused, but no one interrupted him.

"I was about to bring in the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, but of course they were Orientals, too. The difference is only that with the Chinese *Li* is an active, dynamic force, while with us propriety is essentially passive. Perhaps what I mean would be a little clearer if I told you an experience of my own."

The diplomat leaned back ever so slightly, with a delicate movement of relaxation, and Canlon proceeded to relate the illuminating story of Liu Wen-chang.

## II

I WONDER if any of you remember Wang Te-li. He died a couple of years ago in Sinyang, probably poisoned. He was a strong man, Wang, and had done big things, and always wanted to do bigger ones.

Well, just four years ago this coming January, he was *Tupan*—that is to say governor—of Hopei province, and was the principal factor in a military combination directed against Yen Yulai, who was installed in Kiangtung. I was adviser to Yen at the time, and when, during Chinese New Year, the situation became too tight for his comfort, he suggested that I go down into Hopei and somehow induce Wang to see reason.

Wang and I had cultivated each other as far back as 1916, so I could play up the personal side. Furthermore, I had enough of a reputation for honesty to hold the confidence of both factions when it came to a question of guaranteeing subsidies, and being a foreigner I would not be liable to any process of personal detention and polite holding for ransom at Wang's headquarters in Linfu.

Yen was in quite a funk, and pleaded with me long and earnestly, so when he banked a million Mex at my disposal for use in the negotiations, I had my travel-boy roll my bedding and shoved

off at once down the railway to Linfu.

It was a distasteful trip, two days in unheated trains, and one night in an air-tight, vermin-ridden inn halfway. The nature of the journey and the fact that I was crossing a semihostile frontier made reservations on the train or any kind of special treatment out of the question. As a result, on the second day I found myself sitting on my bedding in an open car, originally designed for coal, a single foreigner packed in with some sixty farmers and coolies.

It was a typical North China winter day, the air cold as charity when the wind blew, and like wine when it didn't. Overhead you could almost touch the hard blue sky, and all around us extended the gray expanse of the Great Plain, bounded by a sparse gray circle of wind-whipped trees that we never seemed able to reach.

To the tune of high-pitched conversation, and in the full odor of garlic, fish and sheepskin-smothered sweat, we trundled along at fifteen miles an hour, which with turnouts for military trains netted us six as an average.

At one station, just before we reached the Hopei border, I noticed among the people that stormed our car a fine looking old fellow in his forties, or maybe his sixties. You can't tell about their ages. He had the thin hawk nose that northern raiders have been bringing into China for the last two thousand years.

Below the geometrical set of his cap I could see that his head was painstakingly shaven, and while he wore an ordinary outer robe of fleece-lined cotton, his gown was of heavy and sober silk. His whole air indicated that he was a personage.

I offered him a seat on my bedding roll, and he was grateful for it, because his own mattress was soft and squashy, bundled together any way, Chinese style. As I inwardly admired the thick felt soles of his shoes that insulated him from the iron floor, he

spoke up as usage of our travels required.

"You are his excellency, K'ang," he said. "I have seen you in Nanking several times."

You're always running across people who know you when you travel in China.

"Not wrong," I admitted, "but I do not think I have the honor of acquaintanceship with either your valued name or occupation."

"My surname is Liu, my name Wen-chang." He hesitated for a moment, then went on confidentially: "I am *Taoyin* of the southwest circuit of Kiangtung."

A *Taoyin* is the official in charge of a group of counties, say a fourth of a province. It's a good job, but implies no great individual political strength in the official.

As soon as Liu told me who he was, I thought I saw a light. His only reason for going into Hopei in this unpretentious style must be an interview with Wang Te-li. The old chap probably felt that hostilities were impending, and wanted to make terms with the invading army and thus hold his job if they came into his circuit on their march.

Propriety obviously forbade our discussing our businesses, so we talked suitably of the crops in his circuit, and of the difficulties of making both ends meet, and of statesmen either dead or conveniently remote. He had brought some excellent tea, and my boy got us boiling water at every station, so the time passed more pleasantly than otherwise until we reached Linfu.

There I said good-by to Liu, hired a coolie to carry my bedding, and set out direct to Wang Te-li's *yamen*, for time seemed to press. As we passed through the streets you could feel that military events were impending. The town was overrun by soldiers bristling with arms and cartridges, but while that in itself was normal, I noticed that most of their shoes were new.

Isolated shops were beginning to put up the solid shutters that barred their fronts, a symptom of the ancient Chinese instinct to forestall the looting which they always fear when armies enter or leave their cities.

To cap it off, just before I reached the seat of government, a wheezy motor truck came bounding down the street, crowded with eight or ten soldiers, two prisoners—bound and labeled "Deserter"—and two coffins, whose loose lids clattered abominably. Wang really must have been pressed for time when he could not stage an execution with the proper display of slow-moving tumbrils and a bugle band.

### III

At the palace itself I did not have long to wait. Wang was essentially a business man, and besides my relations with him had been good. After only fifteen minutes or so a secretary came to the anteroom, and holding my visiting card high in the air for all to see, led the way to the *Tupan's* office. It was the usual interminable journey across endless paved courts and through the narrow rooms that framed them. The whole route was studded with down-at-heel bodyguards who tossed their bayoneted rifles to present arms as we went by.

At last we entered the office. It was a cave of a place, sparsely furnished, sub-arctic as to temperature, and it was lined with magnificent chrysanthemums that looked like so many explosions of gold, amber and rubies. Wang always took delight in flowers, and his cold room was ideal for this particular kind even so late in the season.

As we appeared the war lord came to meet me with a quick and birdlike courtesy. A hard-conditioned man, Wang Te-li, slight and spare, a firm mouth with no wrinkles to frame it, and with clear eyes that might have been turned from agates. Tea and cigarettes appeared, and practically at

once the *Tupan* expressed his eagerness to "receive my instructions."

"When a man of the eminence of your excellency, Mr. K'ang, comes to so mean a place as Linfu," he said, "what he has to say must be of the utmost importance to us rustics."

For all his conventionality of phrase, Wang was a forthright man and responded to straight dealing, so I did not mince matters.

"I come on behalf of Yen Yu-lai," I announced. "I have had the fortune to possess the confidence of both you gentlemen, and he is hopeful that through my mediation we may be able to ease the present strained relations between Kiangtung and Hopei."

Wang grinned.

"I hope that Yen *Tupan* named a figure of three million dollars," he remarked, and his eyes grew harder than ever.

"The limiting figure given to me was one million. That is a month's upkeep for a hundred thousand men," I replied.

You do not chaffer with Wang Te-li, and we both knew it.

"I am sorry," he declared. "Three million would have been more in keeping with both our positions. An offer of one makes his excellency, Yen, appear slightly ludicrous; it even conveys a certain implication of faulty judgment. But this is all beside the point; any financial arrangements are now out of the question. Much as I admire his excellency, Yen, so far as personal character and intentions are concerned, it must be quite obvious to you, an enlightened person, that the political activities in which he is at present engaged are most unprogressive and positively dangerous to the welfare of China. The man has become nothing more or less than a tool of militarism. He must be brought under control, and I cannot do less than my duty."

I saw that further talk was useless. Wang's reasoning might be false, for he was just as much of a war lord as



Yen, but his intentions were plain. I said as much, apologized for taking up his time, and asked for some kind of shelter on the next train up the line. I was fed up on steel coal cars in that weather. Wang smiled most amiably and hospitably.

"All efforts to preserve peace are most commendable, and I could not think of your enduring further hardships on that account," he said. "You shall travel with me in my own special, which should start out in only three or four days. No, no, I insist! You cannot plead pressure of business, as all that you can report is that I have not been receptive to your embassy, and that will be obvious from to-morrow when my offensive starts. I have already had your effects moved into apartments adjoining mine, which, while not fitting, are as good as this poor place affords. I now beg the reward of your company at an informal dinner to-night. It should give us mutual pleasure to talk over the old Nanking days."

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled as amiably as I could. After all the man was within his rights, now that the war was started to all intents and purposes. And just here was where the propriety of our interview was shattered.

The secretary marched in with another ceremonially held visiting card aloft in his hand.

"Mr. Yang, colleague of his excellency K'ang, requests permission to join the company of the *Tupan* and the distinguished foreigner," he announced.

Wang shot a look at me that mingled surprise, suspicion and a bit of derision, all overlaid with politeness.

"I have no colleague," I stated. "A mistake has been made."

"It would be well to have him in," decreed the *Tupan*. "It is a matter for investigation and action. Since you, Mr. K'ang, disavow him as a colleague, your witness will be of value

in this case, and I beg you to lend me the help of your presence."

Then to the secretary he added: "Ask Mr. Yang to enter."

For perhaps two minutes we sat there without speaking. Wang's face was bleaker and harder than any human face has a right to be. The secretary reappeared—and ushered in my companion of the train, Liu Wen-chang.

#### IV

WANG cast one rueful glance at me, then devoted himself with effusion to the newcomer.

"Mr. Liu, Mr. Liu! My venerable instructor! The seat of honor is obligatory. I insist! Permit me to offer tea. And a cigarette. No, I can't blame your refusing; the tobacco is very poor. Your coming is a great honor. It is long since I have sat at your gate and received instruction. But you should have let me know that you were coming. I could have prepared such a reception for you as my limited means permit. As it is you cast much shame on my pitiful lack of hospitality."

Liu Wen-chang sat austere in the seat of honor, lately mine. Each fold of his stiff and sober silks was irrevocably correct, inevitably symmetrical, as impossible of derangement as if cut from bronze. His voice was the voice of a judge.

"Te-li," he pronounced, and it was as if he had addressed this master of a hundred thousand soldiers as "Tommy." "Te-li, all is not well with you. As a youth, when you read the four books and the five canons under my supervision, you displayed great promise. Where now are my hopes of you, when I, your teacher, must resort to deceptions to gain your presence? This deception reflects on you, Te-li, not me. Did not Mencius, the philosopher, approve of falsehood when he sought to avoid the advances of a wicked king? How much more is deceit justified

when those in authority must be brought to reason?

"Te-li, I know that you intend warfare to the east and to north. Perhaps you are even not aware that I am *Taoyin* of the southwest circuit of Kiangtung. My counties lie in the zone of your advance. I cannot permit your soldiers to use my people for fish and meat. This simply cannot be, Te-li."

For the first time in my acquaintance with him I saw real trouble on Wang's face.

"Aged teacher," he said slowly and earnestly, "I beg of you to reconsider. My military operations must involve your circuit. This I deeply regret. But, remember, these hostilities are not on behalf of my poor self, nor are they the concern of a single province. They are for China as a whole; they are a necessary step in the reunification of our unfortunate country. Only when we are strong and united can we take our place as a nation, withstand the encroachments of the foreigner, and insure the welfare and livelihood of the people. A small area must endure war so that the whole land may profit. And my soldiers, Teacher Liu, are paid, well behaved and disciplined. There will be no oppression of your people. Once again I pray you to think earnestly on this."

Liu Wen-chang's poise and detachment continued as before.

"Te-li, you must know that soldiers in a community are a calamity worse than flood or conflagration," he said. "This I taught you myself two tens of years ago. That you should have become a leader of troops does me no credit, and doubtless reflects on the character of my instruction. This is a development which it is now too late to avoid. I can and do, however, oppose unreservedly your involving my circuit in your wars. There is no remedy for it."

"Aged teacher, aged teacher," Wang pleaded, "is there, indeed, no

remedy? I beg you to listen. I have long admired the exercise of your talents in administration in Kiangtung. Only the smallness of your sphere prevents others from recognizing, as I do, that a second Duke Yu is among us. Greatly daring, may I not ask if you would not accede to the pleas of the old and learned counselors of the central government if they urged upon you the acceptance of the civil governorship of the whole province of Honan? Thus would the entire country benefit from your wisdom. Consider this deeply, I beg of you."

"Te-li, my present post is almost beyond my poor strength to handle," Liu replied. "If I should desert it now, that would indeed be a confession of incompetence and of complete lack of devotion to duty. As *Taoyin* of the southwest circuit of Kiangtung I am the father and mother of my people. I cannot leave them, nor permit them to be oppressed. I forbid you to invade my circuit, Te-li."

Wang laid his hands, palms open and up, upon the table.

"Venerable teacher, I hear and I obey," he murmured.

Then he turned to me, and his face was hard and eager again. "Mr. K'ang, I shall have to discuss your offer after all," he said.

## V

CANLON stopped, and we were suddenly aware that we had the roof to ourselves. The lights glared with an inappropriate brilliance on the empty space. The Russian band had gone, leaving a curious and undisciplined wreckage of instruments, chairs, and music stands to dominate the scene. A few blue-gowned servants tried to efface themselves against the black of the night that surrounded us. Canlon stirred uneasily.

Out of the darkness below us arose forcefully a ground swell of humanity, the unmechanical and nasal hum of voices that night and day broods over

Peking. It suddenly seemed monstrous to be sitting there in public, a microcosm of the active and glittering Occident, brooded over by all Asia. Canlon resumed hurriedly.

"You see, in China a tremendous importance attaches to the relation of pupil and teacher. It is a bond only less strong than that between father and son. Having taught Wang, Liu was in a position to apply the doctrine of *Li* and to exact obedience from him. Failing persuasion or genteel bribery, the *Tupan* had, as his master said, 'no remedy.' Now—"

"But, Mr. Canlon," spoke up the visiting authoress hurriedly, "what you have told is a beautiful story, and I for one am ever so grateful; but after all, isn't it quite—quite Occidental? Not the teacher-pupil part, of course, but the idea of that magnificent old public servant making that long, hard journey, subjecting himself, perhaps, to physical danger, and standing up for his people even against his personal interest, that seems to me to be essentially western. It's what you expect of Roman magistrates. Where does the

eternal east come in—the real Chinese?

"That is what I was going to explain," Canlon replied. "Liu Wen-chang actually had been Wang's teacher, but he had never seen the southwest circuit of Kiangtung province before that China New Year. His appointment was a paper one, made by Yen Yu-lai. He really *was* my colleague, although I didn't know it beforehand. It had been planned all along that he, not I, should be the boy to put the screws to Wang. If he had appeared at Linfu as Liu Wen-chang, Wang would have suspected his mission and excluded him politely until it was too late, so he assumed the name of Yang and pretended to pretend that he was associated with me. I knew he was a fraud, naturally, as soon as he came in. Wang knew he was a fraud, too, but the force of *Li* forbade him to question the motives of his instructor. Once the old boy got into Wang Teli's presence before a witness, he could not be withstood, because of this pupil-teacher business.

"That," pronounced Canlon, "is face."



#### WINDS OF WISHING

WINDS of wishing blow my ships away  
Upon the dolphin-shattered seas to isles  
Conceived of mist in accidental piles  
Or rainbows born within the ocean's spray.

Complacently the ships bisect the day  
And night with primly-curving waves in files  
To left and right of those enigma smiles  
The gilded figureheads have on display.

Eternally the smiling ships sail out  
Eternally those islands draw their prows  
And in the holds and cabins pirate crews  
Half mad by wine and loot attempt to choose  
Which one shall lead, which one direct the bows  
Of all the ships and plot their courses out.

Jane Henry.

# Office Politics!

*Completing a two-part serial—Fate throws a monkey wrench into the machinery as Jim, the foundling, looks forward to a dramatic meeting with his millionaire father*

By Edgar Franklin

Author of "Don't Breathe It!" "Be Yourself!" etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS REVIEWED

**Q**U the moonlit sands at Coney Island sat Jim Hayner, thirty-five-dollars-a-week clerk in a steel concern, and Betty, who was employed in an insurance company's office.

Love swept suddenly into their souls, and Jim proposed marriage. At the height of their ecstasy, however, Jim decided he had no right to get married, because he had been a foundling and did not know who his parents were. In fact, he hated the very thought of them, for the cloud cast upon his life.

Magnanimously, he offered to escort Betty to her home and never see her again.

"It's unfair to expect you to marry a nobody," Jim said. "We'll just drop the subject."



Betty said she was perfectly willing to leave the subject of Jim's parentage dropped "even after we've been married for years and years," and so love triumphed over eugenics and they were united in wedlock.

They began housekeeping in a small flat on the same floor with mutual friends—Peter Adams and his wife, Edna, also newlyweds.

Two months later Jim expressed his growing discontent with the steel job and voiced his old ambition to enter a big grocery business. Peter, who was employed in the purchasing department at the headquarters of Sedge & Grayborn, a great chain store grocery



system, with branches throughout the country, heard of a vacancy in his office, and recommended James Hayner for it. Jim got the position.

Adams was a go-getter, and proud of it. He gave his pal "inside dope" on how to conduct himself, elaborating upon office politics. Higgins, the general manager, and Mos-sing, head of the purchasing department, were O. K., according to Peter, but Pixley—

Well, old Pixley was the lawyer and pal of Sedge, the big boss—Grayborn was dead—and ran the whole works with lynx-eyed exactness in the absence of Sedge, who was now in Europe. Pixley had a habit—which the employees dreaded—of prowling around the offices and firing all who appeared the least bit incompetent.

"You got to watch your step when that old hellion's around, boy!" Peter warned Jim. "And I don't mean maybe!"

However, when Pixley commented on the peculiar shape of Hayner's ears, the latter disregarded Peter's warning and answered rather hotly that it had no effect on his hearing, his brain, or his work.

Peter was aghast at this defiance of the Sedge & Grayborn bogey man, and promptly renounced friendship for the offender, feeling sure Jim would be fired, and fearing lest he, Peter Adams, suffer for having recommended him.

Jim was summoned into Pixley's office. Such a summons was regarded by the employees as the equivalent to being discharged, but Pixley was merely curious about Hayner's ears, which were shaped peculiarly like those of Sedge, the big boss. Under questioning, Jim admitted he had been left on



THE EVIDENCES  
OF FLIGHT  
WERE IN  
PLAIN VIEW

a doorstep in infancy, and cursed his parents for having deserted him.

Peter Adams now firmly cherished the delusion that Jim would be fired later, and, to safeguard his own job, studiously avoided his former friend. This was office politics!

The next week Pixley called Jim into his office again and explained that his name was really Robert Sedge; he was the long-missing son of the grocery magnate. His mother died, broken-hearted, after the infant's abductor had been killed without leaving a clew, and the body of a drowned baby, believed to have been the Sedge's child, had been found in a distant city. The father and mother were poor at that time.

Pixley cabled for Sedge to come home at once. Then he gave the son a thousand dollars and advised him to remain at his job until Sedge's return, in order to avoid cheap notoriety and

tabloid newspaper publicity.

Peter Adams had a glimpse at the money, and suspected Hayner was shaking down old Pixley in some sort of blackmail scheme, so he deemed it expedient to win back Jim's confidence, if possible. More office politics!

Meanwhile, Hayner used some of his new wealth to adorn his loyal bride. He was curious to meet his millionaire father, but rather dreaded the ordeal.

## CHAPTER VII

### A BLACKMAIL THREAT



OU'RE going to quit your job?" James Hayner asked his wife at breakfast.

"Why—not right away! *You're* not quitting, Jimmy," she replied.

"That's different," said Mr. Hayner. "I don't want you working now."

Betty dimpled and beamed. She appeared unable to do anything but beam at her husband this morning.

"I'll tell them I'm leaving at the end of the week," she said. "I'm not mad about my job, you know. I'd much rather be—well, maybe we could have a little house outside the city, now, and—and babies and everything, Jim?"

"Maybe we can," James grinned comfortably. "We'll have to see how my—gosh! doesn't that sound funny?—how my father feels about things. At that, we'll probably have our own house, wherever you like. I don't know how little."

"I want a little one to start with, Jimmy."

Thereupon, for no reason whatever, James arose suddenly, dropping his napkin and all but overturning his coffee, and gathered his bride into his arms.

"Betsy, it just doesn't seem possible!" he muttered. "Yesterday I was pretty well fussed up, every way, but looking at it this morning—say, kid, we're lucky!"

Presently the not-too-artistic clock in the living room struck in its emphatic way, and James started.

"Wow! Going to be late this morning! There's an awful mess of work coming in to-day and to-morrow, too. You riding down with me?"

"Bet your life I'm riding down with you! I can't leave him without any girl at all," Mrs. Hayner said hastily, as she hurried to the bedroom. "We'll do the dishes to-night."

No mortal could have made a more exquisitely accurate statement than James's about the amount of work due to appear. Thanks to a combination of conditions, work descended upon the New York offices of Grayborn Stores as a killing avalanche; all that day it poured in, and all the next and all the day after that. Most of the force lunched at their desks; many of them stayed until nine or ten each evening.

Unfortunates at home on sick leave were reached by telephone and, if still able to walk and talk, were dragged back in taxicabs to the grind. Employment agencies sent in a little army of emergency workers, and these, dumped into a seething whirlpool of unfamiliar things, grew hysterical and were all but worthless. But through it all, as he paused for breath or a sandwich or a cigarette, one thought returned again and again to James: *each hour was bringing his father, out there on the Atlantic, nearer and nearer!*

The rush involved Pixley and Higgins and all the rest of the big figures. Mid afternoon Saturday, Pixley met James in the corridor and beckoned him into his office.

"Thought you and your wife were coming to dinner with me, Bob?"

"Yes, and I thought I was going to spend all this afternoon shopping with my wife," James smiled ruefully.

"Gone alone, has she?"

"Yes, she wants to look just right for the big event, I believe."

"Jimminy whiskers! I should say

it is a big event," the attorney grinned. "Can't get over it myself, you know; every time it occurs to me that Howard's really got you back, I—I seem to stop short for a few minutes." He yawned and stretched wearily. "Gad! I'm damned sick of working, Bob! This happens only about three times a year, thank the Lord— Your wife's a mighty nice girl, Bob?"

"They don't come any nicer!"

"Light?"

"Dark."

"Um— Dot was dark, too. Very dark," Pixley mused, and cast dreary eyes over the mountain of paper on his desk. "Let's see—what was it? Oh, here it is. Memo from Mossing that may concern you." He squinted through the thick glasses. "Some jack-ass in your department—the name's Peter Adams. Mossing seems to think he's tagging you about, getting in your way and interfering with your work. He wants my O. K. on firing him as soon as the rush is over. Know anything about that?"

"Why, that's the fellow who got me into the office here," James laughed. "No, don't fire him. I think we'll have to give his salary a mighty good boost sooner or later."

"Right!" grunted the attorney, and tore the report across and yawned tremendously once more. "Lemme see. Dinner. We'll have to put that over till next week, now, Bob. I'm running up to Boston to see my only sister. She's ill—oh, nothing serious, but she wants me. Back to-morrow night, I expect. Then—think of it! Thursday at the latest your dad will be with you!"

James nodded. The attorney blinked at him, brightly for a moment, then somewhat stupidly, and just caught another of his yawns. To-day, even the great event impending could not affect him much.

"Say, I have to stay here another hour, but why the devil don't you get out of the madhouse now, Robert?"

"Oh, we're about through out there," James sighed thankfully. "I'm leaving in a few minutes."

The idea of the report on Peter Adams tickled him, though, as he returned to the purchasing office. He grinned at Peter for a moment in almost friendly fashion, and Peter, who was just closing his desk for the day, grinned back rather oddly.

"Going home, Jimmy?"

"Nope. Going to meet my wife up in Fifty-Seventh Street."

"Oh, me! Oh, my!" said Peter.

"Are we shopping?"

"Maybe so."

"The old home neighborhood ain't good enough, no more, eh?" Mr. Adams insinuated with a peculiar smile. "I'll walk as far as the subway with you."

He straightened up and looked directly in Mr. Hayner's eye—then he smiled more strangely.

"Little matter of business me and you have to talk over this afternoon!" he explained.

James regarded him with real curiosity, there in the office, later in the elevator, still later as they came to the busy sidewalk. The Adams eyes were half closed in a distinctly sinister leer; the Adams chin was thrust out in what looked like a deliberately threatening bulldog fashion.

"Now, listen, kid!" said Peter, as they hurried along. "I'm a straight guy, and I can't beat around no bushes; that ain't my nature. What I got to say comes out in that many words, so—Hayner, I always been on the level with you, huh?"

"Who said you hadn't?"

"What I mean, I been your friend. I been your pal through thick and thin, as they say. Oh, sure, I know I was sore for a couple of days, but that's out. You can't hang nothing on that. Right, huh?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"All right—all right. I'm telling you why," Peter continued brusquely,

and it was clear that in some manner his patience had been strained too far. "Hayner, I ask you: how have you been with me?"

"You answer it. How have I been with you, Pete?" James said almost absently, for in truth his thoughts declined to settle on Peter at all this afternoon. They were roaming up to Fifty-Seventh Street, and wondering whether Betty had located the coat she had been raving about these last two days, the kind she had never expected to be able to afford. They were straying down to some unfamiliar dock, beside which a steamer was being warped into her berth; there were crowds at the rails, and somewhere among the crowds—

"Say! You got a hell of a nerve, high-hattin' me this way!" Peter stated with much force. "Who d'ye think I am, to let you get away with stuff like that? Sure, I'll give you the answer. Here's part of it: you done me dirt! And here's the rest of the answer, Hayner: you done the wrong guy dirt!"

"But—"

"Listen!" Peter commanded ominously. "Remember I got eyes! Remember I got ears! Remember I seen that roll! Re—"

"I suppose this is all about something," James yawned. "What's it about?"

"Hey! Don't yawn in my face, no matter how pretty you think you're sitting!" Mr. Adams said, quite viciously. "Remember, only for me you'd never of got in our office at all, and you'd never of connected with—er—with this good graft we're speaking about. Now, I'm no hog, Hayner. Because a guy has a dollar, that don't say I have to snatch ninety cents of it, understand. Fifty-fifty sometimes, between pals. In a case like this, maybe a couple of hundred, if I didn't have to ask for it. You know I could use it; you know what I make. And that 'd'a' been all right, see? But *you!* You button your vest over the four or

five grand and give me—give your pal! —the ha-ha-ha!"

"You're trying to borrow some money? Is that it?"

"Say, listen, kid!" Peter said dryly. "Nothing like that. I don't *borrow* money. I'm like you: I get mine easy, and it don't have to be paid back, understand? So here we are, bo, ready to talk business: how'd it be for you to slip me around five hundred berries before you go uptown, kid?"

James stared frankly.

"Why, I think it would be kind of foolish," he replied.

"Yeah?" said Peter Adams, with a dreadful little smile, as he slowed down and gripped James's arm, drawing him closer. "Well, lemme slip you this earful and then see is it foolish: buddy, *I'm wise to the whole racket!*"

Oh, yes, James jumped a little. He twisted about, peered hard at Peter Adams for a second or two, and became quite chilly. The unprincipled young person's leer was triumphant now.

"What do you—mean?" James asked, not so boredly.

"Hah! Hit you that time, eh, kid?" Adams chuckled. "Listen! It's like this. I look dumb. I ain't dumb. A guy with your pay envelope flashes a couple o' grand, and I have to know where he picked it off, understand? So I start finding out, see? How did I get wise? Say, kid, there's something you'd never figure out in a year!" Peter cried. "Nor ten years! Nor fifty years! But what I wanted to know about this easy money I found out; let it go at that!" he concluded, and winked knowingly at James. "You know what I know; I know what I know; we don't have to shout about it out here, huh? Well? How'll it be about the five yards, papa?"

The chill within James was increasing. All things considered, it seemed impossible that Adams should have learned the truth—and yet it was anything but impossible. There were a



thousand ways in which he might conceivably have stumbled on the facts; and, if he had, and chose to talk about it, the commotion would start at once with himself and Betty in the middle of it, and—

"Listen, wise guy!" Peter continued, dangerously, evidently misinterpreting the pause. "You're trying to frame up the right stall, huh? It can't be done! Why? I'll tell you why. Hayner, I got you into that office, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"My drag down there done that?"

"You say so."

"Oh, I'm not kidding you," Peter went on, sweetly. "What this drag is, I ain't saying. That's my business. But I stand in pretty good with a certain party back in the office—and what I done, I can undo easy!"

"What does it mean?"

"This is what it means!" Peter hissed at him. "One word from *me*, big boy, and out o' your job you go and out you stay, understand! Just one word and you and this graft 'll be miles apart and—"

Hayner stilled a great sigh of relief.

"Here's the good old subway," he submitted.

Peter gripped his arm again.

"I don't get this!" he said swiftly.

"What's the big idea, Hayner? I'm out? We're all washed up?"

"Yep!"

"Well, wait! Wait a second. I'm not riding uptown with you if it's like this. There's — there's certain things I have to do down town here," Peter hurried on, much more dangerously. "Don't be foolish, Hayner. I'm warning you, you can't get away with this stuff. I've been willing to be pals; I'm willing to give you a break now. For the last time, five hundred berries keeps my mouth shut and—"

"Leave it open!" James advised, smilingly.

"Well — *wait!*" thundered Mr. Adams. "Listen, kid! You know

what this means, do you? If we ain't working together on this, I'm working against you, huh? You know that? If I gotta squeal on you to get mine, I squeal!"

James merely jerked loose his arm and turned to the stairway.

"Hey! Listen! For the—the last time—" Mr. Adams called after him.

Hayner only kept on toward his train, presently vanishing, while Peter, who really had no business down town at all, stood just as he had stood upon one other occasion, gazing down the stairs. But this time he was not silent; this time he spoke suddenly, loudly, and with such utter lack of repression that at least one lady of middle age and sound character looked around indignantly for a policeman.

Later on he reached home in a dark, silent mood. He pleaded weariness, and stretched out on the couch in the corner of the living room, cursing the guy who had insisted on selling them this one instead of the one with the real springs, until it pleased him to feign sleep. Edna Adams had hardly a word with her husband until they sat at opposite sides of their modest board.

"Where's all this money you said you were going to get from Jim Hayner," she was moved to ask, tactfully enough, at that time. "I need clothes."

Peter Adams darted one really wicked glance at his bride. She looked entirely innocent. He smoothed away the wicked effect and smiled with much of his old assurance.

"It's on the way, baby," said he. "He ain't quite ready to come through yet."

"What have you done about it?" Edna asked bluntly.

Once more Peter glanced at her and caressed his chin, which needed shaving.

"What was necessary," he replied. "You can leave it to me to handle this, kid. I made a pass at him this afternoon."

"And hit the air instead of Jim—"

my?" Mrs. Adams inquired, with a peculiar smile.

"Say, listen, kid!" Peter said, not so gently. "You know me pretty good by now. When I win, I tell you. When I lose I tell you. But that don't give you the right to wrinkle your nose and make these funny faces at me, understand? Yeah—what I hit was the air, and I don't mean maybe. I don't get it, Eddie. I handed the big stiff a good line—all bluff, but a good line at that—and it got me nothing at all."

Edna shrugged.

"I'm surprised," she murmured, and also arched her brows. "After all the chatter about it, too! Now, what I'd like to know—"

Peter glared. Beyond any question, the lady was sneering now! He looked at his plate, for it was high time to turn this conversation.

"Say, listen, kid!" he said ferociously. "Pipe down on what you like to know! That's out, understand? I'm the business man around here; I don't need no help from you. What I'd like to know is why you can't learn yourself to cook pork chops so they taste like food?"

"Say, listen, kid!" Edna retorted, astonishingly enough, laying down her knife and fork. "When you make enough so that I can buy meat around at Fleischbauer's instead of that rotten Supervia Market, it'll taste a lot more like food! Now you know. And so long as you feel messy to-night, and I don't feel so good myself, I'll put what I was going to say a little plainer: what do you think this stunt's going to get you in the end?"

"What d'ye mean?" Peter asked, much more mildly. During their brief married life they had had three real wordy battles, and each had ended in what Peter at least considered as no better than a draw.

"What you're trying to do to Jim Hayner is like blackmail, isn't it?"

"Sharing a couple of dimes with a pal? Is that blackmail?"

"That's what they call it, Pete, from all I read in the papers. They put 'em in the pen for blackmail, big boy."

Peter thought deeply for at least ten seconds.

"Banana oil!" was his final decision.

"Don't kid yourself, Petey," his bride said seriously. "That could happen easier than you think. Drop this fool stuff right now."

"But—"

"I'm telling you, it's not in your line, and there's nothing in it but trouble!"

Peter stabbed at his vulcanized pork-chop and smiled uneasily.

"Listen, kid," said he. "It's like this. The way I dope it out, Hayner has the goods on old Pixley—see? Well, the old guy is rich, and if he shook down as good as that the first time, there's no end to it. Now, I was the guy that put Hayner next to it and—"

"Drop it!"

"Well, sure, if—"

"Drop it!"

"Well—listen!" Peter persisted, rather desperately. "You might be right; I don't say you ain't. There might be nothing in it. Let's leave it lay a couple o' days, Eddie. What I mean, I'll scout around a little more for a lead. Maybe I'll get a better line. Maybe I'll get a hunch. How'd that be?"

"It'd be like you, anyhow," Edna said bitterly. "I'm telling you to drop it now before it backfires and knocks you cold!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### A FLY IN THE OINTMENT



IN her new raiment Betty was a dream. To James's way of thinking, she was a dream in any old raiment, but with her beauty enhanced by all the new togery—and they had lugged home a ton of it that Saturday afternoon, and

more was to be delivered Monday—she was no less than wonderful.

Betty seemed to have an instinct for clothes, if that was what you called it. That is, even when she had only a few dollars to spend, she never dressed like Edna, for instance. Edna, got up to resemble what Peter proudly designated as a plush horse, always looked cheap and flashy; as good hearted a kid as ever lived, and pretty good-looking, too; but when she started out in that red dress and the red hat that went with it, she suggested nothing to James but the belle of a Coney Island picnic—or something a good sight worse.

You'd have to hunt through a bigger town than New York to find anything more perfect than Betty in a ninety-five dollar dress and a two-hundred-dollar coat and a pair of shoes for which they had actually given up twenty-seven fifty!

James considered her when they were ready to start for the suburbs on Sunday afternoon to—well, just to look at the outsides of a few houses, of course; that doesn't cost anything—and James grinned. Perchance his father wouldn't be so wild about his own progeny, but after he'd taken one good look at his daughter-in-law he'd wish that he had crossed the ocean in a plane instead of a steamer!

With all this ornamentation, with the future such a gorgeous smear of rosy tints, one might have expected Betty to be unqualifiedly happy; and still—well, what the heck *was* it, anyway?

James couldn't put his finger on it. He could no more than sense it. There was a lot of the kid left in the adult Betty, for she laughed and purred and gloried in the pretty things much as James had expected; but at the same time something or other was amiss.

In one fashionable millinery shop, for example, James had scraped an acquaintance with another superfluous husband while Betty was trying on hats—obviously a person of wealth and

station, and an almighty fine chap, too. Why, they'd got on great together, and had quite a talk about things in general, and even shaken hands when they parted. For a block or more, after they were out of the place, there wasn't a word from Betty! James had asked why, and Betty had said she was thinking about hats, which was plain piffle.

Again, in the fancy shoe shop, a really glorious society bud had dropped her mesh-bag—James had picked it up, and for about three minutes they had chatted casually, while Betty was at the far end of the shop—watching them. After they left that store, the same darned thing happened over again!

Well, what was it, then? Was she jealous? Well—hell! she certainly hadn't been jealous of the man. But she had worn just the same funny expression. James fumbled vainly for the answer. It wasn't that she regretted giving up her job; he knew that. Nor that she wasn't wild with joy about the amazing turn in their affairs; she kissed him raptly whenever he asked questions along that line.

Yes, and she had another of the gloomy fits Sunday afternoon, when an agent insisted on taking them through a big, eighteen-room house, worth a fortune, and with just about everything in it that money could buy. He had insisted, after a careful inspection of Betty's get-up; but all through the place Betty clung to James's arm, and whenever she looked up at him it was in that same queer way.

As a matter of fact, she began to sing and look like herself again only when they were home once more and she went about preparing the late supper they had brought in from the delicatessen. Funny!

Mr. Stephen Pixley sent his secretary for Mr. Hayner just after eleven next morning.

This time the young person did not call from the doorway of the purchasing office. She came down the aisle to

James's desk and murmured in his ear; and when James had arisen, nodded, and stepped out after her, Peter Adams all but passed into a convulsion. Hands gripping the edge of his desk, eyes two slits, breath coming rapidly, Peter strained and strained, as if about to leap after his friend—then James was gone, Peter relaxed with a gulp.

Pixley waved his visitor to a chair.

"My boy, Higgins just got an idea," he said.

"Yes?"

"About you. Good idea, too. I'm vain enough to believe that if it hadn't been for this devilish rush the same thing might have occurred to me, Bob. He thinks you ought to have a better line on the business before your father gets back."

"Well—"

"Oh, he's right about that," the attorney said quickly. "There's more rapid-fire business in your father than in any other fifty people about the place, Robert. He'll feel that, once you'd been discovered, we should have given you a pretty comprehensive idea of the executive fundamentals here. If I know Howard," Pixley laughed, "two weeks from now there'll be a handsome partition built across that acre of office he uses, and you'll be in the new part, learning to take some of the burden from his shoulders!"

"Gosh!" breathed James, although it may be said he did not feel this comment to be entirely adequate.

"So that's that, and the reason I asked you to come in is that Higgins wants you to go to lunch with us. Let's make it one o'clock. You'd better leave by yourself, of course, and meet us around there, Bob."

"Around where?"

"Eh? Why—you know," Pixley said, rather blankly. "Around the corner, downstairs—what the devil is the name of the place? The only restaurant in the neighborhood where a man can buy a decent meal."

"Oh—*there?*" said James, thinly, for he knew the exterior of that establishment quite well. A tiny card by the door indicated that the business man's luncheon was priced at one dollar and seventy-five cents—if you can imagine anybody paying that. "All right, Mr. Pixley."

"Tell Mossing you have some business outside and will not be back till three or four. If he kicks, let me know and I'll straighten it out, Bob."

Peter Adams's burning eyes watched his friend's progress from door to desk. James merely smiled at him and resumed business. Peter leaned across the aisle.

"How much, this time?" he croaked.

"Why, he gave me the building that time!" James chuckled.

"No, on the level! To a pal, bo—no kiddin'!" Peter urged, almost pitifully. "How much did he come through with that—"

"Adams!" Mr. Mossing said, loudly, clearly, as he, too, stepped down the aisle. "Are we paying you to work or to hold a series of confidential conversations with Hayner and keep him from his own work?"

"Why—why, t' work, Mr. Mossing! Work!" Peter's small voice replied, as he bounced back into place. "Yes-sir!"

"This isn't the first time I've had occasion to speak to you, Adams," the head of department said, reflectively. "Is it?"

"B-be the last time, sir!" Peter stated.

"You're dead right about that, at least!" Mossing smiled without much joy. "It *will!*"

Quarter past twelve came and James failed to start for lunch as usual. Peter waved away Johnson, to whom, it seemed, he owed one midday meal, on the plea that the old man had given him a call and he had to make a noise like work—so lunch was out. But he left a few minutes after James, with no comment, had departed.



Peter had news for his bride that evening.

"Listen, kid!" he said breathlessly, before so much as removing his snappy hat. "Me—I'm dumb! They're dusting out a cell for me up in Sing Sing! That's what *you* handed me, huh?"

"What is it now?" Edna asked rather wearily, for most of her attention was on the frying pan she was beginning to hate.

"Baby," said Peter, and came close to her, "I got a line on it! Something big's going to break soon!"

"Look out it doesn't break over your dome, Petey," sighed his bride.

"Oh, snap out of it!" Mr. Adams said, quite roughly. "Listen, Eddie! Hayner has the old guy on the run now. It's that serious the firm's taking an interest in the matter, understand! They got to buy off Hayner to save the rep of the business, see?"

"Who told you that one?"

"Me, the dumb egg, told me!" laughed Peter. "This morning the old guy sends for him. This noon Hayner sneaks out late for lunch. And me after him, kid, and where does he go? To the swell dump around the corner, where a sandwich stands you two berries and a guy can't get in without he wears his evening clothes. And there's Pixley waiting for him, and Higgins, too, no less, and he has lunch with them."

"Really?" Edna said, with a faint flicker of interest.

"Well, wasn't I standing outside the window where they couldn't lamp me, giving 'em the up and down for fifteen minutes? And that ain't all. They had the papers with them!"

"What papers?"

"How do I know what papers, you dumb-bell?" Mr. Adams demanded violently. "The papers connected with squaring whatever it is, Eddie. Higgins was showing them to Jim, respectful, as if he was the president of the United States, and Pixley was shooting off his face and urging Jim to do

something, the way it looked. Then Hayner gets out his fountain pen, I suppose to sign 'em."

"Well? Go on!"

"Well, to tell the truth," Peter said bitterly, "the sun was shining in that window, and just then the frog waiter come along and pulled down the shade, so I couldn't see if he signed 'em or not. I guess not—or he didn't get the dough to-day. He didn't look excited when he come back, around four. Well? What do you think about *that*, kid?"

"Me?" Edna spoke with that perfect candor which should obtain in every home. "Just what I've told you: I think you're a nut!"

"Is that so? This is a lot o' hooey, hey?" Mr. Adams demanded angrily. "Here's Hayner picking off maybe a million dollars, and I'm a nut for cutting off a slice for us, am I? Me, the guy that put him where he could fall over it! Me that—say, listen! Did you pump Betty to-day, the way I told you?"

Edna shrugged listlessly.

"I tried. There was nothing stirring, Pete. I hinted around and she wouldn't drop a word. I felt mean at that. I don't think Betty feels so good; she's kind of blue and doesn't say much."

"You're a big help to me, I gotta say that for you!" Peter Adams cried, as he threw up his hands and started out of the kitchen. "Well, let it go at that. The way I figure it, Hayner gets the big roll in a couple of days, now, and then I'll get mine or—oh, say! I got one more bright hunch to-day, kid!"

Edna merely looked at him.

"All right! All right! Ask me about it some time when you feel different. Maybe I'll tell you—see?"

"I see your finish," Mrs. Adams said darkly.

"Yeah? And how does it look to you?"

"Rotten!" responded the bride. She

turned, eyes flashing, and shook the greasy cooking fork at him. "Mind what I tell you, Petey Adams: if you don't get this idea of being a bum crook out of your head pretty soon, Mossing's going to can you and we'll be on the rocks! You can't think about two things at once, big boy; you haven't got brains enough. And don't make any mistake about that: *I'm right!* I can see you walking down Broadway inside a nice sandwich sign, telling people where to get the best dinner down town for forty cents!"

"Just like that, huh?" Peter sneered, as he left. "Well, when you see all this, step around and hand yourself a good meal—for once!"

Edna had been right on another count, too; blue devils of the most mysterious and unaccountable variety were dancing about Betty Hayner. They seemed to be drawing tighter about her this evening, causing James, who was in decidedly good humor, to stare at her repeatedly. She was so restless, so—so darned funny and unlike herself, too!

"Let's go around to the pictures," said Betty, immediately after dinner.

"Come here for a minute first." James drew her gently to his lap. "Honey, what's the matter?"

"Matter?"

"What are you gloomy about?"

"Why, I'm not gloomy!" Betty asserted, and sent a rather dejected sparkle to her eyes.

"Yes, you are. You've been like this for days, kid," said Hayner. "What's the trouble? I should think we had more to cheer about just now than most people."

"I should say we had!" laughed Betty.

"Well, then? Why not cheer?—Say, Betsy, that's a wonderful concern of ours, do you know it? I never realized a tenth of what it meant before listening to Higgins to-day. It's—it's marvelous. We've got branches of one

sort or another in every little nook and corner all over the world."

He waited. Betty, instead of leaning against his shoulder and cuddling into his arms, as she would have done a week ago, was sitting upright and gazing out at the black night beyond the window.

"I wonder—"

"What?"

"Well, I wonder what you'd have been—I mean now, Jim—and what you'd be doing if you'd never met me."

James laughed gayly.

"I can tell you, Betsy. I'd be looking for you, and wondering where you were, and how soon I'd find you, and—"

"Oh, bosh!" breathed Mrs. Hayner.

"Say, kid, you're not mad at me about something?" James asked, in real astonishment.

"Mad at you, darling? Why on earth should I be mad at you?" Betty responded. She kissed him all too flittingly and left his lap. "Let's go around to the pictures, Jimmy."

"Well, but you said—"

"No, I didn't. I—oh, I'm just sort of tired and nervous, Jimmy. I don't know what it is. Maybe I quit work too suddenly—something. Maybe I've lost my balance, with all the new clothes and everything."

"We won't buy any more," James said blankly.

"You bet we won't!" replied Betty Hayner, with a little shiver. "I was counting up this afternoon what we've spent. I'll go and get my hat."

All through the movie show she held his hand tightly. Later, when he commented on the picture, he suspected she had not seen one foot of it! James was greatly puzzled. In fact, the more he thought about it, the more puzzled he grew. A man would have said that Betty, so astoundingly elevated from forty dollars a week to an income that might be almost anything in the way of size, would have been raving crazy with joy. Well, Betty certainly was

not! She acted as if somebody had hurt her, as if—as if—

James collided with Mr. Pixley in the corridor next morning, just as the latter was arriving for the day. The attorney, grinning widely, seized upon him and led him to his office.

"News for you, boy—news!" he chuckled, as he shed his overcoat. "This dinner date I've been talking about, Robert—you and your wife—wanted to have you at my place."

"Oh?"

"Well, I have something much better to offer this morning. We'll dine to-night in your own home! How's that?"

"You mean uptown in my father's house?" said Hayner, oddly thrilled.

"Correct! I've just come from there. Hardly expected to get the place open before Howard returned, but I reached Drew, his butler, by wire yesterday, and he came back at once and put old Mary—who, believe me, is the world's wonder cook!—back on her job within the hour."

Mr. Pixley rubbed his lean hands and grinned on.

"Efficient devil, Drew is. He got there about four yesterday afternoon with a force of cleaners, and this morning the place looks as if it had never been closed. Glad?"

"Yes!" was Jim's reply. "I—I'm anxious to see the inside of the house. Betty and I have walked past it. It's—it's imposing."

"It's big, at any rate," mused the attorney. He ceased grinning and sighed. "There's not so much to be seen. I mean to say, there are no art collections or hobby furniture; Gray-born Stores is Howard's only hobby. Everything's correct; everything's expensive. Personally, I think it's a damn cold sort of place, and I imagine your father is working around to the same idea."

"Well, then?" Pixley continued. "Suppose you clear out early, get the

only girl and meet me there about half past five? That'll give you a chance to look around before dinner." His grin came again. "And next week we can stop this business of sneaking about, and associate openly. My Lord! What a sensation it's going to kick up around this shop!"

James's key rattled unexpectedly in the apartment door a little past four. He heard a rush of feet and what certainly was running water, for Betty, to all intents, had been surprised while treating her lovely features to a remarkably thorough wash. But for that, when she greeted him with some astonishment, he would have thought she had been crying.

"Put on the war paint, Betsy!" said her husband. "We're going to have dinner with Pixley in dad's house!"

"What? W-when?"

"To-night! Right away!"

He had looked forward to this moment, too, on the ride uptown. He had expected Betty's eyes to shine and her hands to clap—she really did clap her hands on occasion, in the funniest, dearest kid fashion. But now the hands were hanging limply and the eyes were far from shining.

"You go alone, Jimmy!" she said suddenly.

"Alone?"

"Yes—just you go and—"

"What for?"

"Well, I'm tired to-night again, and—"

"What's the real reason, kid?" James asked, as he caught her shoulders.

"Why—just that, and—and—well, Jimmy, wouldn't you rather go alone, this first time?"

"No!"

"Yes, you would. Because—because it's the first time, you know, and it's your father's house, and—well, you'll feel better seeing it alone for the first time," Betty explained, quite lucidly. "Run along and shave, dear."

"I'll get myself something home here."  
 "Does that mean you really don't want to go?"

"Well—this first time. Yes."

James shrugged and smiled faintly.

"You're a funny kid," he muttered.

"Well, in that case, we stay home. I'll go out and call up Pixley and tell him."

"Oh, no! No, not you, Jim. You go!"

"Not without you, Betsy."

The deep eyes were looking up steadily at him. Something was on her mind; that was all James knew. He couldn't make a thing of it!

"All right, Jimmy," Mrs. Hayner said suddenly. "Then I'll go, too."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES



S Hayner observed once again, standing there on the Central Park corner of the block and cocking an eye at it, his father's mansion was the biggest of a row of big houses. Ten or fifteen years hence, if things around New York kept on as they were going, it would have been turned into an expensive rooming establishment or torn down to make way for a twenty-story apartment building; but at present it was the best of this particular group of elaborate homes.

Betty was trying to enthuse now, as they mounted the four wide steps. It was sort of ghastly; not one word rang true. Something was all wrong with Betsy, and—well, she was just like a scared kid, of course; that was all it amounted to. James smiled down adoringly and squeezed her arm.

All their lives they had been completely unaccustomed to luxury, but James got used to these new ideas with much less difficulty than Betty did. She'd be all right, once she got inside and looked around a bit and began to realize that, if it pleased her, she might very likely be having this address en-

graved on some swell writing paper of her own.

Mr. Pixley reached the door before Drew—the latter a smallish, capable-looking person, who lurked in the shadows for a moment and then disappeared. Pixley opened wide the door and bowed low.

"Welcome, by thunder!" he said. "Welcome!"

"Gee whiz!" breathed James, almost to himself, as he entered and gazed around him. "Er—Betty—Mr. Pixley, of course."

The attorney held her rather limp little finger and patted them with his other hand.

"Well, you're a mighty sweet and pretty youngster, I must say!" he observed. "I think your husband has altogether too much luck for one man. You're still Mr. and Mrs. Hayner, by the way. Drew's probably all right, but the shock might start his tongue. Now come along and see what you think of the place!"

Hands in his pockets, jests on his tongue, an altogether different being from the sinister old person who sent terror thrilling through the offices, he led them about.

And it was all there, James noted rather numbly—everything you read about in magazine stories! There was what the original builder had intended for a small ballroom, which had never known a ball in Howard Sedge's day; there was an equally practical, equally worn music room.

Sedge's considerable library lay to the rear, and this room, at least, looked as if some one had lived in it; and there was the big dining room, with furniture heavy enough to have done duty in a baronial castle, and a small reception room which looked fairly cozy.

"They sold this to Howard one week when he was infernally busy with other matters," Pixley sighed. "He'd been living in a hotel for five years, and all he wanted was a good roomy house, all to himself, in a first-class



neighborhood. He got it! Let's go upstairs."

A sudden throb came to James as he stood in the suite that was his father's own. Queer little chills disturbed him as they wandered through bedrooms, all perfectly furnished, and glanced into bathrooms, all perfectly polished.

It was a grand house; you had to say that for it; only who'd want to live in a place like this? Maybe if there were kids running around and yelling, and if everything weren't so hellishly neat and precise, it would be different, but—James gripped himself on the edge of a new shudder.

Probably something wrong with him, eh, that he couldn't appreciate all the grandeur? But Betty, when you looked down and caught her unawares, seemed about ready to burst into tears, and, up here, even Pixley's high spirits had suffered, for the corners of his mouth were dragged down gloomily.

But—well, say! Wasn't it just about what you'd expect a house to be, with no woman to tend it and mother it and turn it into a home? By golly! There was the answer, all right!

Mr. Pixley's spirits revived, however, when they sat down to dinner. Presently James understood the reason for that, although Betty wasn't eating much. Pixley had put it far too mildly when he called the invisible artist a mere wonder cook! Why, this was the kind of meal one dreamed about occasionally, but never expected to find. Eventually, James sat back with a broad and complacent smile, and, for once in a way, accepted a cigar.

"Mary is sixty-seven years old now, and has a prosperous son who is urging her to retire," Pixley said sadly. "It's too bad. I feel that I may last for another twenty years, and what I'm to do without two or three of these dinners in anticipation each week, I don't know. Oh, well—Anything you young people were planning to do with the evening?"

"We hadn't made any plans. Probably you—"

"Oh, my dear boy, I never make plans for an evening after one of Mary's dinners," Pixley laughed. "I'm too filled with a great peace to do much more than sit in the library and contemplate life indulgently. That's the wild sort of evening Howard and I usually put in, at any rate. Shall we go there for awhile now?"

He was at great pains to settle Betty in the library's most comfortable chair; he seemed to have taken a mighty fancy to Betty! Vaguely, James wished she would enter a little more enthusiastically into the spirit of the occasion. She just sat there, saying hardly a word, smiling wistfully now and then. More than anything else, she looked like a small girl, feeling very strange in a big, strange place and anxious to go home.

Pixley had embarked on a rambling discourse about the house itself and the man who had built it originally, when he snapped the discourse off short and sat bolt upright with:

"Well, here! What's all this? Who's coming in with a key?"

James frowned his astonishment. It was a rather remarkable thing to see the Pixley poise disturbed, yet now it seemed to have been shattered! The gentleman was on his feet and crying:

"My soul! Not possible that your father's here so soon, is it? No, it's not, but—oh!"

A final start and his excitement was gone. He looked at James for one peculiar second as voices came suddenly from the region of the front door.

"I guess it's—well, wait here a moment, please, and—no, she's heading this way, apparently."

"She?" James echoed.

"A Mrs. Carswell—friend of ours, friend of your father's—she lives a couple of blocks uptown from here," the attorney hissed swiftly at him. "He usually leaves a key with her when he's away, although I'd forgotten

it for the moment. Got her confounded daughter with her, too, and some one else, I think, and—"

He straightened up and became the imperturbable Pixley once more. James arose and stared, not quite so imperturbably. The unexpected visitor was entering now—a lady of some quality, James judged from the clothes, the general air, and the supercilious smile.

She was perhaps forty-five, properly slender; she had a nose, slightly hawk-like in its curve, that looked mean. Also a pair of hard, calculating eyes, which, in rather less than one second, had examined James and Betty and returned to Pixley, smiling, as she offered her hand.

"Well, Stephen! You'll have to forgive me. I didn't know that you were here and entertaining."

"Hello, Lyda," the attorney said. "Yes, I'm—er—here, although I'm rarely—er—very entertaining, I fear, or—"

The lady gazed straight at him.

"But why all the confusion, Stephen?"

The attorney scratched his cheek and smiled grimly.

"Well, the fact of the matter is, you've placed me in a mildly disturbing position. You—ah—oh, rot, it doesn't matter, of course. Hello, Gene!" he added to the girl of twenty, who was unquestionably her mother's daughter, and still further: "Ah, you have Alicia with you, too! That's good. Hello, honey!"

He beamed at the third member of the party. James looked and all but beamed himself. This other girl, obviously a friend of Miss Carswell, was a regular panic for good looks! Big, soft eyes, thick, curly hair, cheeks that were rosy with sheer health and—well, that was enough for a bridegroom to be thinking about another girl, eh? James frowned vaguely and tried to make the frown rather bored!

Pixley was presenting them all around, in the blandest way. He was

presenting them as "Mr. and Mrs. Hayner," too, and James was shaking hands, particularly with the Alicia girl, whose other name turned out to be Farmer.

And now, by golly, they were sitting around, and it looked very much as if they'd settled down for the evening! James rather enjoyed the prospect; he had arrived at the big, old-fashioned leather divan at the far end of the library, with Alicia settled down beside him. Gene Carswell was over there with Betty, and chatting away at a great rate. Mr. Pixley regained his cigar.

"Now for the cause of my confusion, Lyda," he said. "I must ask you to keep the matter completely secret for three or four days, and that applies to you girls as well. You'll see the reason in a moment. Ah—young Mr. Hayner here isn't Mr. Hayner at all, you know. He's—did Drew go downstairs again? He did?—then: Mr. Hayner is really Robert Sedge, Mr. Howard Sedge's son!"

"His *what*?" Mrs. Carswell cried.

"Howard's son, Lyda—yep!"

"Howard has no son!"

"Ah, but Howard has!" the attorney said firmly. "For there he sits! Why, look at the boy, Lyda. Look at his ears."

The lady looked at James—and James just missed starting back and throwing up his hands defensively. When that woman's eyes wanted to be malevolent, they could be malevolent! They were darting at him, and her color was fading a little, leaving a bright spot on either cheek.

"Well, but—why, Stephen, that's the most—"

"Hold on a minute, lady!" Pixley laughed. "I'll tell you about it."

He sketched the astonishing story briefly and unsentimentally. Mrs. Carswell and her daughter listened, both with lips parted and a skeptical light in their eyes. The girl beside James exclaimed once or twice under

her breath, quite to herself.

"So there you are," he concluded, "and we'll have to keep it quiet until Howard returns, for the reasons I've mentioned. After that—oh, I don't know," Pixley chuckled. "Privately, I think he'll go mad with joy when he sees the boy, and come out of his shell at last and possibly turn into a regular society man, eh?"

"That would be charming," Mrs. Carswell murmured, bestowing a farewell glance upon James.

"So that's that, and we can drop the subject. Now tell us some of the million interesting things you've been doing, Lyda!"

Pixley might consider the lady interesting; James certainly didn't. She seemed to be talking in fits and starts, and about nothing in particular.

James was giving no great attention to her, but this girl Alicia was one of the most delightful conversationalists alive! Once or twice he glanced in Betty's direction, to see if Betty happened to be feeling neglected. Apparently she was not; Miss Carswell was rattling on and on, and Betty seemed to be paying attention and popping in a word of her own now and then.

Oh, yes, the evening was hurrying right along, and—well, what had that pregnant look of Mrs. Carswell's meant, directed for one hypnotic second at Pixley? Why, for the matter of that, had she shot a vicious glare at James as she arose?

"I came into see what Drew has done with the house—" she remarked vaguely, and started for the door.

Pixley's brow was puckered. He glanced at James and after the lady—and back at James and after Mrs. Carswell again. What the Sam Hill was it? Was he trying to convey some sort of message? James's brow also puckered.

"I'll—ah—look things over with you, Lyda!" Pixley said suddenly, and moved after her.

Alicia was still going on with her

latest little story of Dresden, last summer. For awhile James drifted back pleasantly into the Alicia atmosphere—and shortly found he was drifting out of it again. Pixley, in fact, had just about ruined the evening with his mysterious glances. What had they signified? Had he been telling James to follow him, for some reason?

This bright thought revolved in young Hayner's head for many minutes. Perhaps that was it. Perhaps he had been invited to some sort of private conference and he had been too stupid to grasp the invitation? They had been gone a long time, now, and showed no signs of returning, which rather lent color to the idea.

James grew more and more uneasy. At last, quite tactfully, he piloted Alicia Farmer over to the other two girls and excused himself. At least, it could do no harm to find out.

Where the dickens had they gone? He stepped on, soundlessly, toward the front of the house. Oh, in the reception room, eh? Jim had just caught Mrs. Carswell's voice and he stopped short, six feet from the doorway:

"—For the tenth time, Stephen, I tell you that's all utter nonsense, and I want the truth about the creature!"

"Lyda! Please don't scream like that!" Pixley said testily. "I have told you the truth, and—"

"You've told me a pretty little lie that sounds as if it had been taken from an old-fashioned book. Howard has no son—no legitimate son, at any rate!"

"I assure you—"

"I'm not questioning the fact that he's Howard's offspring. One needn't look twice at him to know that. But if there was a single word of truth in all this tommyrot you've been inflicting on me, Howard would have told me years ago."

"Ah, but that's where you're all wrong, Lyda!" said the attorney. "As concerned Howard, the subject was closed forever to discussion after

Dorothy's burial. In twenty-five years, even between ourselves—"

"Stephen, please! I'm not a Victorian schoolgirl!" Mrs. Carswell snapped.

Out in the corridor, James stood with fists clenched. Dizzily, he wished Mrs. Carswell were a man, that he might have stepped in and dealt with the situation. Instead, he was just standing here with temples throbbing, growing redder and redder.

"But you're a most astonishing woman, as you are!" Pixley said tartly. "I must confess it hadn't occurred to me that—"

"Stephen, use your wits! You've plenty of them. This cock and bull story didn't deceive me for one instant; Gene was laughing when you spoke your little piece. In Heaven's name, do you honestly expect people in general to accept it as—as fact?"

"It happens to be fact—a matter of record all the way through!" the attorney rapped out. "And it would be well for you and for these people in general to—"

"Tell me, Stephen," said the lady, who seemed determined that Pixley should not finish a single sentence, "just what hold he has? His mother is alive, I suppose?"

"His mother is dead!"

"Is that fact, by any chance?"

"I'm not going all over it again," Pixley said wearily.

"Then why on earth was he allowed to appear at all? Why wasn't he bought off? He has documentary proof of some sort, of course. Couldn't you buy that from him? He couldn't comfortably insist that Howard recognize him, I should think. And assuredly he's not the exalted type, beyond the reach of money! He might be one's chauffeur, if one were not too fastidious. And his wife's a cheap little thing, Heaven knows, Stephen. A woman would have to be, to marry a—a—"

"You've gone far enough, Lyda!" the attorney said furiously. "Why

the devil are *you* so sore about all this?"

"It will injure Howard terribly. I have his interest at heart."

"Then keep your mouth shut tight, my dear, until Howard gives you liberty to open it!"

"But Stephen—"

"You heard me!" barked the attorney.

There was a little pause. James gritted his teeth and held his breath. The lady laughed lightly.

"True, Stephen. Your manners seem to have suffered. I shall use my own judgment about that."

"About what? About telling people your own confoundedly nasty conception of the matter?"

"Put it that way, if you choose."

"You mean that you'd deliberately harm this boy and harm Howard, for no reason on earth? Well, Lyda, I forbid you—"

"Oh, no, you don't, Stephen," the lady laughed again, and more easily. "No man can forbid me to do anything I feel inclined to do. If you want to be sure of my silence, you'll have to call in some of your protégé's gunman friends—he has them, I suppose? That's the only way."

"Well, I'm damned if I know what's the matter with you, but—"

"And I'm damned if I know what's the matter with *you*, Stephen!" the lady said crisply. "I should have expected you, of all people, to get him out of sight forever, without a soul the wiser!"

"But whatever it is, I've had about enough of this chat!" the attorney said acidly, and there was a shuffling of feet. "Lyda, for the last time I warn you, and warn you solemnly, that—"

James fled.

Outside the library, he paused and tried to get a hold upon himself. At least, he wasn't red now; he was cold all over. And the worst of it was, he'd have to keep on acting naturally till they were out of this. A fairly decent



man isn't supposed to stand around listening to other people's private conferences, whatever their nature.

"I—I think we'll have to run along now, Betty!" he said.

"Oh?" smiled Betty, with utmost readiness. "Very well."

"Oh, not so soon?" Alicia suggested gently.

"Yes, I have to—have to get to work in the morning, you know," James managed.

Pixley and the delightful lady were right on his heels, too; he hadn't left the corridor one second too soon. The corners of the former's mouth were dragged down, but Mrs. Carswell smiled composedly.

"What's all this? Party breaking up early?" the attorney grunted in some astonishment.

"I think we'd better—"

"Oh, I'm satisfied, Robert. Dead tired myself, for some reason. Anybody tell Drew to get the things? Very well—very well. I'll ring for him myself. Did you walk over, Lyda?"

"Of course. Just to make sure that Drew hadn't muddled things for Howard. Don't bother about us, Stephen. We'll walk back."

"As you please," the attorney said, sourly. "Well, my car's somewhere outside. I'll drive you two youngsters home, Robert— What's the matter with Drew, anyway?"

Drew appeared. Presently they were ready to leave, and good-bys of a slightly constrained nature were being said. Mrs. Carswell failed to offer her hand to James; instead, she gazed directly into his eyes.

"Good night, Mr.—Hayner, I believe we're to call you? We may see more of each other. We are to be related in a way, you know."

"Beg pardon?" James said.

"Yes, indeed! I'm going to marry your father!" Mrs. Carswell explained brightly.

"You're going to do *what*?" Mr. Pixley gasped.

"Why, I—I didn't know that!" James stammered.

"No, and I didn't know it, either!" cried the attorney.

Mrs. Carswell smiled quite sweetly and turned toward the door.

"Well, now you both know it," she said.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB

**P**IXLEY'S head was still shaking at intervals as he started the engine of his big car. A minute or more he stared straight ahead; then he awoke with a jerk and turned to James and Betty, in the wide back seat.

"Breaks my heart to deprive you of my artless prattle," he said, "but I can't talk and drive at the same time. Got another chauffeur coming in the morning, thank Heaven, but—"

His words were drowned in the roar of the motor. The car rolled down the block and edged into the uptown stream of traffic.

James settled back with a short, heavy sigh. Betty wasn't nestling against him, as might have been expected. She sat gazing silently out of the window on her own side, and that was just as well. The ghastly pall that had rested upon all James's earlier life, seemed to have thickened about him once more; if Betty stayed over there, she'd hardly study his expression, and she might escape infection from his gloom.

There were so many angles to a case like this that a man never thought of at first! Now, who the heck ever could have foreseen that a woman like this Mrs. Carswell would turn up and act that way? Well, at that, maybe any one could, if he were inclined to look at the dark side of things; but in the last few days James had been passing pleasantly from shock to satisfaction and from mere satisfaction to a highly

joyful state of mind — now he had been kicked back almost to the starting point!

It was a dead sure thing, if the Carswell woman were as ugly and determined as she seemed, he'd be well besmirched in his father's circle of friends before he even met them. And — why, that meant he never could associate with them comfortably and happily. For he'd be damned if he'd have anything to do with a set of people who were always thinking, more or less privately, that he was — well, well! No use getting so excited about it just now, perhaps.

He'd have to have a talk with Pixley first thing in the morning and see what could be done.

James sighed again — and again.

And then, willy-nilly, his mind left his peculiar troubles and he quickened to the possibilities of the moment. Maybe Pixley was too old to be driving; maybe, as his hunched shoulders and bowed head seemed to indicate, he was only deep in thought. At any rate, he was moving uptown with the care-free speed and straight-line effect of a taxi driver, and they had missed the side of that bus by just about half an inch!

Still, the attorney delivered them at their door without having brushed so much as one hub cap, and there he smiled disarmingly at Betty:

"Do you want to take your key and run upstairs?" he asked. "I have some business pointers I had — er — meant to give your esteemed husband this evening, before the women turned up, and you'd probably be bored to death."

Betty left almost without a word beyond the barest of good nights. Stephen Pixley waited until the door of the tall flat house had closed behind her.

"Now, my lad!" he said grimly. "I had a reason for keeping you here, of course. Get ready for a shock!"

"I don't have to; I've already had

it," James responded more grimly. "I was out in the hallway and heard all she said."

"The devil you were! All?"

"I guess so. Oh, I'm ashamed of myself, but I can't say I'm sorry. When I got there, she was asking you for the tenth time to tell the truth, and when I left you were warning her solemnly."

"Umum! Well — you didn't miss much. Thanks for listening, Robert. I'd been wondering just how to make it clear to you."

James caught another sigh.

"And that woman's going to marry my father!"

"What's that? Rot! Poppycock! She's going to do nothing of the sort, Robert!" the attorney exploded.

"But she said —"

"I don't give a damn, what she said! Take it straight from me, she's *not*! Oh, I don't say that she herself doesn't consider it settled, Robert, and made all her plans in the conventional way. And I'm well aware that once the average lady has decided to marry the average man, it's all over but paying off the minister and throwing the rice. But I will say, my boy, your father is one of the few men who simply cannot be married. Rest easy on that score, at least."

"I don't know," Hayner muttered dubiously. "It seems unlikely —"

"Never mind what it seems. I've got one hundred thousand dollars to bet against anybody's thousand that she's never your stepmother, kid. It's remotely possible that somewhere, at some time, something or other has been said by Howard or by herself when Howard and other people were around which led her to take a long chance on that premature announcement, but I doubt even that," said Pixley.

"Still, I'm glad she threw her bomb when she did, Robert," the elder man continued. "It explained a lot to me. Why, I thought Lyda had gone crazy when she began carrying on like that about you; but if she's meditating mat-

rimony it's rather easy to understand that an unexpected son might—"

"Who is she, anyway?" James demanded impatiently.

"Eh? Why, just a widow we met socially, twelve or fifteen years ago. She's moderately wealthy. She always seemed a thoroughly good sort to me, so far as that goes. She has looked after a lot of little things for Howard, here and there, that only a woman can look after, I suppose. There has never been a suggestion of an attachment."

"Well, there's enough of a suggestion now on her part, that she's willing and anxious to make my life unbearable for the sake of getting me out of the way!"

"You have a blunt way of putting—"

"I've had a damned blunt time of it all my life, and these last few days have been pretty happy, Mr. Pixley," James laughed bitterly. "I—well, I tell you, I've always had a hunch that if I ever found out who my parents were, there'd be trouble. And here it is, coming in about the craziest fashion a man could think of! This infernal woman's going to spoil everything. You know as well as I do that once she's done the dirty work, I can't face—"

"Robert! Robert!" protested the attorney. "You're exaggerating the whole business, I assure you. I mean to see Lyda in the morning, of course—she's rarely out of bed before noon—and appeal to her sanity and her better nature. If she hasn't enough of either to work on, I intend to give her a lecture on the legal aspects of the case which will—ah—settle things."

"You're not convinced that it will, are you?"

"But I—why, I am, of course, convinced you!"

"No, you're not, and I'm not either," James said gloomily. "That woman is mad all through, and full of spite; she's playing for big stakes, apparently. She may lose; she may not. But by the time she's finished advertis-

ing me as an illegitimate child among my father's friends, I've lost, anyway. That's that!"

For many seconds there was deep silence in the dark car.

"I suppose you've been working too hard, for one thing, and getting morose," the attorney muttered. "Don't know that I'm not in a rather similar condition myself; but—see here! You know one thing, don't you? If your father were here now, he'd have Lyda back in her box and nailed up tight for the rest of time, and he wouldn't marry her, either. Take that as Gospel, boy; that's how your father does things, and he never fails!"

"But he's not here."

"No, but—well, wait a minute. Let's see. He'll be here when? Thursday! And how's she likely to go to work? Umum— Well, at a guess, Robert, she'll invite a few friends to dinner by telephone and start her broadcasting that way, and—"

"Exactly! To-morrow night!"

Stephen Pixley forced a smile.

"Let's do what you once suggested—drop the subject, Bob," he advised. "If she talks too much and it comes to the last ditch, we'll clap her in jail, blast her hide!"

"And by that time I'll be branded, anyway!"

Mr. Pixley started his engine again.

"Go to bed, young man; you're in an abnormal frame of mind," he said.

"And—here!"

"Yes?"

"Don't say one word of all this twaddle to your cute little wife, Robert. She's happy, bless her heart, and she's going to stay so. Good night!"

Betsy may have been happy, but she didn't look it, James reflected as he entered his little home, humming as blithely as might be. She was in the bedroom, half undressed, just standing there and staring at the big picture of himself she had insisted upon as a wedding present. James gave her a bear hug, found no response, hung up coat

and vest and went to work upon his collar.

"Looks kind of small around here, after being down there, doesn't it?" he grinned.

"Does it?" Betty murmured.

"Doesn't it to you?"

Betty shook her head and continued to study his picture.

"No," she said. "I like it here. It's—it's home."

"Well—sure. It's home. I like it too, kid. I wouldn't live in that house on a bet, but—"

"Don't be silly. You'll get used to it."

"Me?" James laughed. "Not in a million years! You see—"

"Yes, you will. Easier than you think."

James ceased his laughing and stared at her. She had turned away; her lips were trembling. James took her in his arms—and she was just as limp and remote as before!

"Betsy, darling! What the Sam Hill is the matter with you lately? Do you have to cry because we're not likely to starve to death?"

"I'm not crying, Jim," said his bride, and he observed that she was not. She was just looking up at him and down again and picking at a button on his shirt.

"Well, then—tell me about it, whatever it is. Is there something I don't know about that's troubling you? Come on, tell papa!"

Betty laughed queerly.

"Well, no. You—you don't really know about it. You will later, or you would if—let's sit down and perhaps I can tell you."

"Well—yes," James agreed, sitting on the bed beside her.

Abruptly, she was looking up at him again. Adoration was in her eyes, and unutterable pain. James could do no more than frown at her and wonder whether—well, say! This kid was *sick*! He would have risen and started in the general direction of medical at-

tendance, but that Betty's arm linked tightly through his just then. And she no longer looked at him; she was studying the picture of the man she had married.

"It's hard for me to—to tell you; you'll have to understand," she said, uncertainly. "You'll be so—well, here's what I'm trying to say, the idea, I mean. That girl to-night, Miss Farmer, Jim. She—"

"Is *that* it?" cried young Mr. Hayner. "You're jealous?"

"Dearest, I'm not one bit jealous, on my word of honor." Betty smiled straight up at him. "I'm just trying to illustrate what I mean. You liked her, didn't you?"

"Why—yes, of course, if it comes to that," James said uncomfortably. "She's a bright girl, honey. She's been all over the world, and she—"

"You don't have to blush, Jimmy, truly. You're helping me, and I think I need help. She—she wasn't a bit like me, was she?"

"I'll tell the whole world she wasn't. There's nobody alive like you, Betsy!" cried her husband.

He squeezed her and breathed somewhat more easily, for it was plain that Betty meant to be reasonable about the matter.

"Now, just a minute, before we go any farther with this, and I'll make a clean breast of it. Betsy, I'll admit that for about five minutes I did think she was a darned fine, attractive girl—nothing like you, but a looker. Well, after we'd talked about another five minutes, I knew better than ever what I'd known all the time; they may come nice, but they don't come as nice as you, darling. None of them!"

"But that's not what I mean at all," Betty smiled forlornly. "You liked her, and she liked you, and you got along nicely and talked and—everything like that, just as if you'd always been with just that kind of people. Didn't you?"

"Why—I guess so, Betty."



"That's what I mean!" Betty said thickly.

"I give it up!" James inquired. "What's the answer?"

Now she was looking at him tenderly, trying to smile.

"Jimmy, I love you so it hurts!" she confessed. "It honestly hurts, all the time. I'd die before I'd let anything harm you—and I'm the one who is harming you now."

"What?" rasped James.

"Yes, because if you'd never met me and never married me, you'd have married a girl now like that Alicia, or some much nicer girl, perhaps, and she'd have helped you and made valuable friends for you and been a credit to you and—and I'm just cheap and a weight on your shoulders and—"

"Hold on there, kid!" James said soberly. "This would be serious if it wasn't funny. I don't want—"

"It isn't funny, Jim. It isn't anything but just—just so. I know just what I am, you know. My people were poor farm people, and I've never had any real education or mixed with nice folks and—well, you're different, Jimmy. It was born in you, I suppose. You take so easily to the nice things, but I don't, and I never could, and I'd never want to when I had to feel—"

"That 'll be about enough of that!" her husband said, as she choked. "I didn't know anything like that was in your head. Why didn't you say so before and get it over? Let's go to bed!"

"No, let me finish, Jimmy. I—I think I'm going away."

"What?"

"Yes, for—for a year at least. Yes, I know you love me, darling, and you may feel a little bit bad at first; but you'll be busy, and with a lot of lovely people all the time, and—and maybe the right girl—I mean the really right girl—will come along and—well, if she does, I could go out to Reno or somewhere and—"

"Say, are you *crazy*?" Jim demanded harshly. "I'd no more—"

"No, I just want you to have your chance, Jimmy! Every bit of every kind of chance there is!"

Twice James swallowed before he could speak.

"Betsy," said he, "if I didn't love you just as much as I do, I'd take you over my knee and give you one damned good spanking, and that's no joke! I'm much obliged for the chance and all the swell dames you're wishing on me and all that, but if it's all the same to you, I'll keep the wife I have. So that's the end of that! Isn't it?"

"If you say so, Jim," Betty whispered.

"No, but I mean really: *isn't* it?"

"If you say so."

"But you—well, you don't sound as if you meant it, honey! Isn't that the end, or do we have to—"

"Yes, Jimmy! Yes, dear! Yes!" Betty laughed queerly.

"Because—because—why, my Lord!"

"Come on to bed!" said James's wife in the most natural voice.

Unexpectedly, she went to sleep in a very few minutes, which was more than James could do for a long, long time. Ten thousand thoughts were tumbling around in his head. That damned Carswell woman, throwing a wrench into the works. Pixley wasn't any too sure that he could handle her, and James was a lot less sure that Pixley could handle her. If it hadn't been Mrs. Carswell, it might have been some one else.

Betty was sobbing in her sleep. No, she wasn't. What in the name of common sense had ever put those loony ideas into her head? Somebody been talking to her? Who?

She was crying in her sleep, at that! James reached over and patted her. Somehow, she got hold of his finger and hung on, even in slumber. Just like a baby! And she wanted to leave him so he could have a chance. Well, to hell with that kind of chance! James discovered another gulp in his throat;

it ended in a long, shaky sigh. Say, on the dead level, he almost wished—

## CHAPTER XI

### A ONE-NIGHT COURSE IN ETHICS



AT one o'clock the door of the Adams apartment opened suddenly and Peter entered. Edna arose from the hard couch, dropped a wet handkerchief and faced him, eyes flaming. So were Peter's eyes flaming, although differently, and his cheeks were red.

"Well, for the love o' tripe!" Edna gasped, by way of greeting. "*Where have you been?*"

"Out, *bambino!*" Peter cried exultantly. "What's biting you? Didn't Mrs. Phelan, downstairs, give you the message?"

"She said you phoned you'd be delayed and late getting home! I'll say you're late getting home!" Edna pursued rather hysterically. "I thought you'd been rolled over by a truck or slipped under a subway train or somebody'd—"

"Psst! Hey! Pipe down, kid!" said Mr. Adams. "We got neighbors!"

"I don't care if we've got a million neighbors! I thought—"

"Well, it's something to know you was worried, at that!" Peter smirked complacently. "Baby, I been out on business."

"Business with who?"

"Business, kid! And I done it—and how! Oh, boy!" Peter chortled astonishingly. "Listen! I got to give you the low-down on this now, I guess; you'll get it out of me anyway. I been out with a skirt!"

Edna recoiled.

"With another woman?"

"Not the way you mean," Peter chuckled on. "I'm telling you, this was business and—"

"Who is she?" Edna demanded.

"Say, kid, for the ooomph time,

this was *business*, so lay off that stuff and come away over here from away over there and sit down. Yeah, right beside papa, till he spills it, because this is *good!*"

He paused, almost overcome.

"Why, Eddie," he said raptly, "around Monday or Tuesday, the way it looks now, you can go buy one of them fur coats with all the—"

"Who is this woman?"

"Well, kid, her name is Sylvia Bond," Mr. Adams said resignedly. "She's old man Pixley's steno, understand. A nice kid. Nothing for looks, but nice. She has no boy friend; she falls easy for a guy that works right and knows what he wants. That's how I had her doped out, and that's how she was."

"I seen her at noon time," he went on, grinning like an ape, "and I asked her did she want to go to dinner and a show to-night—I been thinking of this a coupla days!—and she asked me wasn't I married, and I asked her how did she get that way, and who had the grudge against me in the office, trying to poison her young mind like that. So she let it go at that, and we made the date. We had quite a good dinner."

"And me sitting home here like something stuffed!"

"Wait, kid! Wait! I give her a good line. She wouldn't come across while we were eating. Well, we let it drop. Then I tried her again when I was taking her home, and by this time I wasn't in so bad, understand, and she come across!" He paused, and his smile grew awed. "She was scared to give me all I wanted, but she give me enough to—"

"Petey! This is a bum stall!" said Edna Adams. "You—"

"Is it? Listen!" Peter admonished, dropping his voice to a husky whisper. "This jane opens all the old guy's letters and telegrams and cables, see? *Cables*, see? Once in awhile the old guy writes his own messages and she

don't see 'em, and he done it this time; but she seen the answers, all right, Eddie. And here's where you drop dead, kid! *Old man Sedge is on the way home from Europe now to see his son—and his son is the guy we call Jimmy Hayner!*"

"You've been drinking!" said Edna.

"Say! You give me a pain in the ear!" Peter shouted, neighbors or no neighbors, but almost immediately he was calm again, and smiling a sly, ugly smile. "At that, you're only dumb. I gotta explain. Don't you see, the old man never was married, Eddie!"

"Why—why, do you mean—"

"Well, *certainly!*" cried Peter.

"Well—poor Jimmy!" muttered Edna.

"Where d'you get the 'poor Jimmy' stuff?" her husband asked, rather blankly. "Ain't he sat down in a barrel o' butter? Listen, kid! Here's how I figure it: Hayner wasn't wise, or he'd 'a' been in that office and started collecting before I ever was there, understand. Well, I put him in there, and some way he got wise—and now the old man himself is hot-footin' it across the briny, trying to get here and hand over the bundle of dough before Jimmy squeals—and then start him off to live in China the rest of his life, I suppose!"

"Can you tie that?" Edna murmured, and shook her head.

"Now you're getting it, huh, kid?" Peter vibrated. "Two or three days and he gets here and him and Jim close the deal—and before that I get mine! See? *I get mine!* He can get it from Pixley and—"

"How do you get yours?"

This time Peter paused and stared at her, wearily, wondering.

"It ain't only you can't learn yourself to cook; you're the same about everything, huh?" he breathed. "Well, all right, kid: here's the blue print of the joke. I go to Hayner to-morrow, understand? I say to him, how much is it worth to keep this out of the pa-

pers, see? I say to him, you've seen these tabloids, haven't you, and these other papers, huh? How'll it look to you, I ask him, if I sell this, now, story, and they come take pictures of you and—"

"You mean, you'd tell about this to the papers, for money?"

"I won't have to, baby!" Peter said blandly. "He'll throw a couple o' fits and beat it to Pixley; Pixley'll throw a couple o' fits and want to know how much it costs to keep me quiet, understand? There's nothing to it!" Mr. Adams ventured, with a sigh of pure delight. We got ten grand—maybe fifteen grand!—just the same as if it was in my pocket now. I'm bad, huh?" he grinned in conclusion.

Edna's eyes flashed at him.

"You're worse than bad! I'll say you're rotten!"

"Huh?"

"You wouldn't do it, Pete! You wouldn't do a thing as dirty as that!"

"Well, but—"

"No, you wouldn't!" Edna blurted out. "Because, if it's really like that, Jim ought to be sympathized with and not hurt, not blackmailed, not—"

"Listen, kid," Peter said patiently. "I guess you don't understand. This is business, see? He gets his, I get mine. What's wrong with that? Wasn't *I* the guy that put him next to all this? Ain't *I* entitled to a cut? Well, certainly I am. Wouldn't any other guy get his the same way? He certainly would! You got a lot o' bug-house ideas, Eddie. You're—you're kind o' dumb!"

"Well, I may be dumb, but I'm no crook!" the bride flared. "And I tell you something, Pete Adams: if you do anything like this, you're just a dirty dog!"

"What?"

"Just a dirty dog! A decent dog wouldn't rub against you!" Mrs. Adams insisted, flamingly. She rose and stepped away from him, toward the bedroom.

Looking after her, Peter wilted slightly. Confusion came to his eyes for a little; he frowned—and then shook his head, tolerantly enough.

"Listen, kid!" he said. "You got this all wrong. It's simply a little matter of business, the same as anybody might do—the same as everybody's doing all the time. Why, Eddie, every guy that's got something to sell tries to sell it, don't he? A guy that's a go-getter, like me, is—"

"Just a dirty dog!" repeated Mrs. Adams from the doorway. "And I hope you get all that's coming to you—and, believe me, *you will!*"

"Because I work day and night, trying to make a decent living for you, I'm a—" Peter was just shouting as the bedroom door slammed.

Ten seconds he glared at it. Ten more he devoted to a curious process of deflation, during which his color faded out and the whole of Peter seemed to shrink, until he was a mere huddle, glowering blackly at the handsome rug on which nine more payments were to be made.

On the level, who could have seen that one coming? What he meant, how could any guy guess a woman would feel that way, even a dumb woman? Would she squawk like that when she was stepping out with a couple of thousand dollars' worth of fur coat draped on her? What a chance! *What a chance!*

But—well, now, Eddie was an awful clean little kid; you had to say that. She'd never stand for anything phony in all the time he'd known her. Only this wasn't phony. But it looked like the kid thought it was phony, and if she felt that way, maybe a lot more wise guys might think so, and—hell!

What kind of nut would he be to pass up ten grand which some one was practically trying to hand him? Huh? A worker like him that knew his groceries and—well, then again, a man wants to live peaceful with his wife, don't he?

Peter scratched his perplexed head.

Certainly she wasn't throwing any bouquets at the big idea just now; he blinked before a sudden, shrewd suspicion that maybe she never would stand for it or help him put the good coin back in circulation! Because the kid *was* clean, and absolutely on the level, and if she really thought this regular stuff was crooked, and felt the way she did—well, it wasn't crooked, but—

Seven cigarettes later, Peter Adams literally tugged at his hair and threw up his arms wildly and started for bed. He was minded to hold further exhaustive discussion of the proposition; but when he had poked thrice at his spectacularly slumbering bride, Edna kicked him viciously and bade him keep his hands to himself and shut up.

Peter growled, shut his teeth and stared up through the blackness.

When he went to work next morning there were dark circles under his eyes. Most of the night he had spent in catch-as-catch-can wrestling with a problem of pure ethics, perhaps his first.

## CHAPTER XII

### BETTY'S CONFESSION

**F**OR days Peter had been watching James Hayner's every movement with cat-like eyes, following him about the room and to the door and, when feasible, taking the rest of his anatomy off to trail James as far as might be.

This morning, however, he sat quite still, mentally and physically almost immobile. There was plenty of work to be done; he did little of it, and that little badly. In the main, he glanced now and then at James Hayner with dark, reproachful eyes, which flickered up dangerously now and then and promptly returned to their dark, reproachful condition.

You see, it was like this. In a way,



he had to consider James a friend. He hadn't been doing much of that kind of considering lately, but at their rather hectic breakfast Edna had pitchforked the thought back to the top of his consciousness.

Well, then, can you double cross a friend? Well, sure you can, some kinds of friends! And James had been that kind lately, Peter would tell the cock-eyed world, with his high-hat and all.

But at that you had to be sorry for him, maybe. A guy with no father he can talk about is getting a rough break, no matter how much kale he can drag down. Peter's own father had been an absolutely honest bricklayer, and he'd though a lot of the old man—although he had to admit he hadn't realized it till after the old man croaked.

And Hayner looked rotten this morning, too; looked as if he hadn't slept much more than Peter, and he was kind of jumpy and nervous.

Well, maybe Peter could be big, the way Eddie had put it, and forget the dirt and—aah! Apple sauce! *Apple sauce!* Where Peter studied in night school, there was nothing in the book about being big and passing up ten grand because a guy looked a little bit tired!

But, at that, it was kind of a hold-up, he concluded after another inspection of Jim Hayner. Oh, like hell it was! The simple reason the guy looked nervous was that he was scared something would slip before he could get his! And another thing—well—well, listen! Here's what he would do:

It was a good bet something would break inside a day or two. If Peter didn't do his stuff to-day and put it over, it was a better bet his stuff was cold and sour and not worth one yard, much less ten grand. All right. It was long after lunchtime, now, and nothing had happened, at a guess because old Pixley wasn't in yet. Well, around quitting time—see?—Peter would hook on to Hayner, slip him enough news to get him interested, and

then take him around to Ryan's, where they could buy a drink and, at that hour, sit quiet at a table. Then he'd put it to Hayner as the straight business proposition it was, and—well, if he squeaked too loud, they'd let it drop. There! Could a man do fairer than that?

"If you have nothing to do, Adams," said Mr. Mossing's nice, clear voice, "go over to Mr. Tomlinson's office and see if he has anything for us on that sliced pineapple shipment."

Peter started and arose and went to Mr. Tomlinson's office, to discover that that gentleman had about one ream of things concerning the sliced pineapple. These he gathered up absently and started back, and he was just passing the main switchboard when the girl called:

"Oh, handsome! Your sweetie wants to buzz you!"

"What's that, baby?" Peter asked, from afar.

"Just this second. Take it here and Mossing won't have to give you a call for wasting the firm's time."

She smiled brightly and, having pushed an instrument toward him, resumed work on the Cupid's bow with her lipstick. Peter laid aside his documents and grunted:

"Adams speaking. Who's this?"

"Is that you, Petey? This is Eddie!"

"Didn't I just say it was?" Peter asked cordially. "What's on your mind, kid? You know we ain't allowed personal calls in this dump, and the more—"

"Pete, this is important!" Edna said breathlessly. "Betty's packing up. I was just in there."

"For what? Is she going somewhere?"

"She wouldn't say. She laughed and said she was cleaning up, Pete; but she looked like she'd been crying her eyes out. Do you think Jim ought to be told?"

"I don't get it!" Peter mumbled truthfully.

"I say, she's got one suitcase all packed and strapped, and the new big valise thing Jim got her is standing open and pretty near packed. Do you think he ought to be told?"

"Don't he know? I don't want to go butting in when—"

"Of course he doesn't know! Why would she be crying if he did know? I think he ought to be told."

"Well—" said Mr. Adams.

He could go tell him, of course. If he did, and something was wrong, Hayner would fly the coop in ten seconds, and that 'd be the last of him for the day—and once he was gone, an inner voice assured Peter, he was *out* so far as the ten grand was concerned. Maybe not, but he had a hunch! No reason for it, exactly, but when Peter had a hunch it was good, nine times out of ten.

So it meant practically passing up the ten grand and—and, at that, you had to admit that Hayner used to be a decent, regular guy, and he'd done a lot of little things for Peter; moreover, Betty was a cute little trick, Jim was dippy over her, and if she ever did beat it, and Jim didn't know, and if something happened to her—

The girl at the switchboard laid aside her lipstick and devoted her whole attention to Mr. Adams's expression, which was worth watching.

He looked exactly like the handsome fellow in the picture she had seen just the night before. This highly attractive devil, you see, was in the upper floor of a burning building. Over his shoulder he had the man who had been his friend and wronged him, and who was, at the moment, inconveniently unconscious.

Well, the fireman got up a ladder at last, and the walls were swaying every way you could think and sure to collapse within a few seconds, so it was a question whether the hero would pass out his enemy to the lone fireman and, the ladder being incredibly small and frail, take a chance on getting away

himself when they were down, or whether he'd drop his burden into the flames and escape himself.

In the end, his noble nature won and he passed out the man who had wronged him—and as the walls swayed more horribly he looked down and smiled in his utterly noble way, with exactly the same expression which Adams, of the purchasing office, was wearing at this minute.

"Well—all right, kid! I'll tell him!" puffed Peter Adams, for the struggle was over and his better nature had triumphed.

He sped back to the office, down the aisle. He leaned close to James's ear.

"Say, listen!" said he. "Your woman's beating it out o' the flat!"

"What?" James was startled.

"On the level, Jim. Edna just telephoned me. She thought you'd ought to be told about it. She says Betty's got a couple o' bags packed, and she's been crying and—"

Adams said no more. James Hayner, even then, was at the front of the room, wheeling doorward, out! Mossing, emerging from his own office, gazed with deep interest at Peter, who was sitting at his own desk again, hands clasped before him, smiling in a vacant, rueful way which suggested nothing but impending imbecility.

"Er—Adams!" said his chief.

"You started for some invoices and bills of lading and so on, I believe?"

Peter started up.

"What's that, Mr. Mossing? Well, what d'you know! I forgot 'em and left 'em outside. One second!"

Down in the street, James considered a taxicab for the briefest moment, thought of traffic, ran for the subway. Mercifully, he caught a train at once; they were none too frequent at this hour of the day.

After that, for a long, long time a person with whiskers, who looked like a comic-strip anarchist and was actually a psychologist of note, studied

James from behind his paper and reflected at length upon the insane tension of New York business life. Here was a man—hardly more than a boy—physically splendid, who should have had all sorts of poise and reserve energy; and yet, after a short business day, he was on the way home just an inch this side of plain hysteria.

Jim twitched, glared at people, and then mumbled jerky apologies. He tried to look out of a window which could not possibly reveal anything but soiled wall, an occasional light, and some steel pillars; he played with his fingers; he picked up a paper from the vacant seat beside him, tried to read it, threw it back to the seat, and began tapping with his foot. Too bad!

As a matter of fact, if this devilish train didn't get up some speed pretty soon, James Hayner fancied he'd go up to the first car, get the controller handle away from the motorman and show the passengers a real nonstop flight to the upper city.

He'd never ridden on a train that went as slow as this! Stations loitered by; trains dragged along, going in the other direction—and any one of them might hold Betty, who was going—where?

He didn't know, and couldn't guess. Everything had seemed all right at breakfast time. That is, Betty had been natural as at any other breakfast. He had taken occasion to deliver a stern remark or two, concerning the kind of nonsense Betty had been talking last night, about going away. And she had just laughed and bidden him to forget about it, the assumption certainly being that she had forgotten about it herself. Only she hadn't apparently and—well, they were getting uptown at last.

James bit his lips and stared fixedly at the psychologist, without ever seeing him; the latter became downright uneasy and went to the car behind.

And here they were at last! Mr. Hayner leaped up to the street three

steps at a time and covered the rest of the distance to his home on a dead run. Panting a little, he burst into his little home with a wild:

"Betty! Betty!"

"Yes! Good gracious! Yes! What's the matter?" Betty gasped as she ran to him from the bedroom.

"You're—still here!" said James.

Mrs. Hayner looked around and shrugged. The two bags were in plain sight.

"Yes, Jim. Who told you?"

"Never mind who told me! Where were you going, if I hadn't caught you?"

"I—don't know. No, honestly, Jim. Just somewhere that you couldn't possibly find me for—for awhile."

"Why?"

"You know why. I *tried* to tell you," said Betty, with a strange smile.

James Hayner tossed aside his hat and dried his rather moist brow. Also, he removed his coat, for he was about to get down to business. He stepped to Betty and snatched off the cute little hat they had bought on that first astonishing night. He next picked Betty up bodily and carried her to the one really big chair and sat her upon his knees.

"Now, kid, we're going to thrash this right out to the finish and have done with it for keeps!" he stated.

"Yes, Jim," his bride smiled forlornly.

"Don't 'yes' me that way; talk it straight out, Betty! What is wrong, honey? Come on! Let's get it cleared up for good. One more trip like that and I'll die of heart disease."

"I've told you. I want you to have your chance, and you can't have it with a wife like me."

"That is—"

"No, it isn't. Jimmy, what do you suppose your father would say if he really saw me? He's used to cultured people, wealthy people, people who—who know about everything and do everything and—he'd just look at me

and probably be polite at first and—I hate him!”

“For—for turning up?” James stut-tered.

“No, I don’t hate him,” said con-sistent Betty. “But—oh, I know, or I think I know, how you feel just now,

“A year be—hanged!” cried James. “I—say, there must be *some* way of hammering sense into your head, kid! I wish you’d give me a line on it!”

“I have too much sense, Jimmy,” the girl sighed bitterly. “I wish I had less.”



JAMES WAS SAYING  
BRILLIANTLY:  
“WELL—FATHER!  
WELL—WELL—”

but I’m sure I know how you’d feel later on. Don’t look at me like that, Jim! I’m not crazy or self-conscious or sensitive or—or anything. I just *know*!”

“You’re just raving!” James sub-mitted. “Betty!”

“Yes?”

“I want you to promise to drop this idea of leaving.”

“No.”

“Well, does that mean that every time I’m out of your sight I have to think that you’re making a run for a train?” Mr. Hayner asked, with some heat.

“Don’t think about it, darling. Just forget me for awhile and then—oh, a year from now, or two years—”

“So do I, if that’s what you call sense. Why, Betty, almost the first thing I thought of when Pixley told me was how many things *you* could have and how happy *you’d* be; but in- stead of that you’ve been getting sad- der and sadder ever since, and now you want—well, at least you’re not going away. Not if I have to stay home here with you!”

An arm was tight about his neck. The lady had decided to look up at her husband, although her eyes were brim- ming.

“Jimmy, dearest, don’t you see— can’t you see—how much better it ’ll be that way? You’ll be happier and I will, too, honestly. Because I love you so that if—if I had to feel that



your father was—well, looking down on me all the time, I'd die and—"

"Wait! Wait!" said Hayner. "This is all sort of boiling down to my father, isn't it? Scared of him?"

"Well—perhaps—" Betty sighed.

Mr. Hayner held her close to him and thought—and thought. Jumbled things were taking coherent shape in his mind at last.

He could stay on, of course, and face it out and try to live it down if the lady really did all she seemed to have in mind. And there was a rotten job—one for which he had no stomach at all! The funny thing was, he seemed to be getting it now! He began to suspect that, for other reasons, he was about as anxious as Betty herself to leave New York. He—

"Listen, kid!" he said suddenly, quite after the Adams manner. "You've got your mind made up to go?"

"Yes, Jimmy."

"All right. There are some things I haven't told you. I guess I won't tell you now and get you more excited. But so long as you're going, I'll go with you!"

"What, Jim?" Betty asked quickly.

"Yep! You'll understand when you know all about it. You'll have to dump one of those bags and let me have it, and we'll pack the trunk and beat it in the morning, if you like. Maybe Eddie would see about putting the things in storage? We'll go to Chicago, and I can get a job in our branch there, or to Omaha or San Francisco, if you like, and I'll write my father and Pixley and they'll understand, and—well, it sounds like some of your own raving, kid, but honestly I'll be a lot happier that way, and it's a cinch that you'll be, too, and—"

"But that isn't what I meant at all!" Betty cried, and suddenly beat upon him with her little fists. "I want to go away and—"

"We're going!"

"No! No! I want to go away

where nobody can look down on me and have my baby by myself and—"

"Have your what?" James gasped. "Yes!"

"Are you sure about that!"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" Betty sobbed on his shoulder.

"Well, for the love of—" James managed, before his voice quite failed.

Slowly a grin came to him and he held her tighter. His voice returned.

"Well, if you ask me, I'm darned glad I decided out loud to go along with you before you told me that, for if I had you'd always have thought—who's that?"

### CHAPTER XIII

#### WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE



JAMES HAYNER sat up with a jerk. So did Betty. Together they gazed at the tiny foyer this side of their entrance door. Come to think of it, he hadn't closed

that door, and now some peddler—

"Hey! Who are you?" Jim barked, as he hurried in that direction.

He stopped, scowling confusedly. It wasn't a peddler. At least, it didn't look like a peddler. It was an almighty well-dressed man of sixty or a little less, and—say! His ears! His crinkly ears!

"Why—why—" James choked.

The visitor seemed in no more rational state. Twice he attempted to speak before words came.

"You're—Bob?"

"Well—you can't be—this is only Wednesday—"

The caller mastered himself and stepped forward.

"I had a speed-boat sent out—two hundred miles out, to take me off and—oh, Bob! Bob!"

And with this explanatory speech, his arms were about James Hayner, and, for that matter, James's arms were about him as well, and James was saying brilliantly:

"Well—father! I—well—well—"

Betty stood perfectly still, staring. She wished to turn away and could not turn away. It was Jimmy's father all right enough; he looked like Jimmy. And—gosh! but he was a good-looking man, and not at all what she had expected. That is, except for his clothes, you wouldn't have known he had ten thousand dollars in the world, far less millions and millions.

And he didn't seem as if he'd act like a millionaire—however millionaires acted! He looked—well, he looked like Jimmy, only with a harder chin and mouth and something terrible in his eyes—something that hurt when you looked at him. Betty turned away.

"Yes, Bob—yes," the stranger was laughing, very huskily. "She's the most interesting woman in the world to me, your wife. My dear, please turn around!"

Betty gazed up at him, and he was studying her, although not in the way she had expected. His eyes were wet again. Betty herself sniffed suddenly.

"Well, you dear lamb!" said the deep voice of Grayborn Stores. Mr. Sedge gathered her into his big arms and kissed her.

Things were growing more and more confused. Betty seemed to be weeping on the bosom of a perfectly strange man, and just what he would think of her she didn't know, and, somehow, didn't care particularly. He liked her! What was the matter with her, that she couldn't stop crying, once she'd started? Sedge was trembling.

"My dear—"

"Her name is—Betty!" James submitted, with a mad little laugh.

"Well, it's a very sweet name—almost as sweet as its owner," said the total stranger. "Betty, may I take Bob off—alone, somewhere—just for ten minutes. You see, we—I—"

"We—yes! Let's—in here!" said James, and started for the bedroom.

They did not quite close the door. Betty wished they had latched it. They

were—yes, they were crying in there! Or Jim—Bob, that is—was sort of sniveling, and his father was sobbing.

It was awful! It was ridiculous, a couple of big, strong men like that! Well, no, maybe it wasn't ridiculous, if everything years ago had been just as terrible as it sounded. The wonder was that Bob's father hadn't shot himself, or something. But it was awful, just the same. Betty began to choke again—and then, with a whisk, she faced about with:

"Oh, it's you, Eddie!"

"I—I just came over," Edna said, rather palely. "Who's sick?"

"Nobody!"

"Wasn't it your house the doctor came to in such a rush, Betty?"

"That wasn't the doctor. That was Jim's—father!"

"His father!"

"Yes, his father. He was stolen when he was a baby, Eddie, and the shock was so awful it killed his mother—you don't know about it; it was a sort of secret till his father got back from Europe and—"

"His regular father? His—his father and mother were married?"

"Well, *of course* they were married!" Betty said hotly. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, my—" Edna began, and sat down suddenly as her knees and voice failed together.

For some reason the young person seemed stunned. Betty wasn't paying much attention to her, in any case. She didn't want to listen to what was going on in the little bedroom, but her hearing was painfully near perfection. They were over the worst of it, in there. They were talking, together most of the time.

"Is that possible?" the bigger voice barked savagely. "Well, I'll settle Lyda in two minutes, my boy, and be sure I have the means to do it! Why, I can't believe—see here, we'll go down there at once, before we do anything else, if your Betty will come—"

The voice trailed off. James—Bob!—mumbled at considerable length. The big voice laughed:

"—of me? I don't believe it! She looks too sound and sensible, Bob. Why, that youngster of yours is the dearest thing I've seen since—"

"I—got to telephone Pete!" Edna forced out, and rose dizzily. "What are you crying about?"

"I'm *not* crying!" Betty snapped. "Wait! I want to put these darned bags in the kitchen before—"

"You're not going away?"

"Where? What for? I told you I was just cleaning up, didn't I?" Betty asked indignantly, as she staggered into the kitchen.

"I got to telephone Pete!" Edna reiterated, and still seemed unable to move.

"You don't have to telephone!" said Peter Adams himself, as he thudded in. "Why ain't you home? What's the door doing open?"

They gazed at Peter. Incontestably he was different. His personal breeze had died down to a breathless calm; his prominent chest looked hollow; his usually brilliant eyes were glazed.

"I got canned!" he said sullenly.

"You *did*?" Edna wailed.

"I got fired! Chucked out on my ear! Mossing done it, the old pill!"

"Well—" Betty began soothingly, for he was making a good deal of noise, although the pair in the bedroom seemed to be giving no heed.

"Yeah! And if you ask me, it's *your* fault, pretty!" Peter Adams informed her. "Why is it? Because this dumb-bell o' mine telephoned down you were flying the coop, and me, always little helpful *me*, no matter what I have to take for it, I hop it to your husband and forget a couple of papers, and for that and for talking to Jim about five seconds, I get canned!"

He threw out his hands. At the moment even Peter was near to tears. He looked at his wife.

"I got no job!" he explained, by way of making the matter more clear.

"Didn't I tell you you'd have no job?" Edna asked, scathingly.

"And because you told me—" Peter shouted.

"Petey! Petey! We—we've got company!" Betty said hurriedly.

"Why'n't you say so?" Peter inquired, a shade less vigorously. "Well, company or not, kid—"

"And about your job, Jimmy'll get it back for you—that's an absolute promise, Pete, and he'll probably be able to get you a raise, too."

"I'll take it home," Edna said briefly. "Come on, you. They got company!"

"Well, I ain't horning in on their company!" Mr. Adams expostulated, although he moved toward the door. "Betty, if this is on the level, I mean if you can fix it some way—"

"She can. Keep going," said Edna.

They were gone at last. The door clicked after them. Betty stood quite still. Sedge's big laugh boomed out.

"Well, by the time I'm through with that kid she won't think I'm looking down on her!"

Betty shuddered deliciously. Gosh!—after all—he was nice!

Out in the corridor Peter Adams paused.

"I didn't drop the hooks into Hayner after all. You thought it was crooked," he said.

"It's a good thing for you, you didn't!" Edna replied.

"Well, I'm telling you, it's only for your sake I didn't!" Peter grumbled. "I pass up ten grand—I do that lob a favor—and what do I get? *Canned!* What I always say—"

"Never mind what you always say," Edna retorted, and, as they were now at the door of their home, she gave him a really vigorous push. "Get in there!"

"And shut up!" Mrs. Adams added as she slammed the door.

# By Candlelight

By Marion Brandon



*A Christmas tree story, with all the good old adornments of symbolism and sentiment*



THE Baylises, across the street, were hanging their Christmas wreaths, one on each of the two white columns by the front steps. With their long, fluttering scarlet ribbons, they gave the little house the air of being part of the picture on a Christmas card. No doubt that was exactly what Mrs. Baylis was saying to her husband as they stepped backward down the walk in order to command a better view of their handiwork. Watching them

there, coatless and hatless, in the sharp-edged afternoon air, for all the world like a pair of children, Agatha Wynne felt cold and sick; but no matter what room she might seek, the same sort of thing was to be seen.

From the rear windows there was a full view of the Parry back yard, in which the entire Parry family, down to three-year-old Nancy, was engaged in the task of trimming a birds' Christmas tree, loading the branches with strings of cranberries, peanuts, and suet, and not forgetting a gay red



Santa at the top. Even here, in the front of the house, the happy shrieks and laughter of the little Parrys—ably reenforced by their big father—bore clearly to Agatha's ears.

In the bay window of the house on the left, the Earles, both of whom sang in the choir at St. John's, and who would have to be at church for the midnight service, were getting a forehanded start on their tree, while the little Earles assisted the little Parrys outside. Next door on the right, the Barlows had a candle in every single window, all ready to light with the falling dusk.

Every house on the street was brave in the panoply of Christmas Eve—every house but Agatha Wynne's, which alone bore no sign. Every child was busy and gay—every child but hers, sleeping so dreamlessly out there under his blanket of spotless snow. Every man was at home to help with the preparations—every man but hers, gone, God knew where!

Wearily she sat down by the wide window. At least the Baylises had finished their task and would soon be going in. Her house was as silent as a place of death, in wretched contrast to the bustle and happy confusion of last year. Little Hugh had wanted a Christmas Eve party, and the dining room had been festive with holly and red candles and snapping mottoes. A tiny Christmas tree had centered the big oval table, loaded with miniature gifts. There had been children's voices, children's laughter, and the cordial "Merry Christmas" greetings of the parents who came to take them home.

Then the real tree had been set up and the family gifts arranged. Hugh had asked for a steel building set, with a motor—thank God, they had given it to him, though it was far too elaborate for the mechanical abilities of a small boy of eight! Then there had been the rubber-tired fire truck and the gay new sled—the same sled which, a

month later, had carried him so cruelly under the wheels of that long gray car. She could see the car now, huge and gleaming, the giant chauffeur in his smart uniform, on his knees by the motionless little shape in the snow.

"God help me, madam!" he was saying, correct even while the tears streamed down his tanned face. "God help me! I've two of my own like that!"

Little Hugh! Always busy about something; his face always a bit streaked, his hands never quite clean; always happy—forever still now!

It had been Hugh's death that brought things to a crisis between Agatha and Anthony. Her grief had been stormy and exhausting, her rebellion fierce; and Anthony's calm, stony acceptance of the tragedy had almost maddened her. He had always irritated her by his lack of apparent feeling.

No matter what happened, he took it quietly. Nothing ever seemed to make any difference to him, one way or the other. Nothing had the power to shake his everlasting calm; but, when her heart was wrung with agony, to have him simply not care, to make it plain that he hadn't really loved the boy! For he couldn't have loved Hugh, if he let him go so easily.

"My dear," he had said, "taking it this way won't bring the little chap back; and it's bad for you, terribly bad. Try to take hold and begin again."

Begin again! She couldn't recall what she had said to him then. All she remembered was Anthony's voice, as unruffled as ever:

"If you have been feeling that way about everything for so long, perhaps I had better get out, and give you grounds for—"

She had collected herself at that, and they had discussed it all very calmly, coldly, and reasonably. As long as they were so plainly unsuited to each other, couldn't see things alike, and had nothing in common, now that Hugh

had gone, it seemed only wisdom to part. Anthony would leave her, and she would bring the suit.

It was all very simple. Anthony departed the next day, whither she did not ask. The company had many offices and plants, and a transfer was easy to arrange.

Life was indeed a strange puzzle, Agatha reflected wearily, as she turned away from the window. The Baylises had gone in long since, but the breeze whipped the gay streamers of their wreaths into flames of living warmth in a cold white world. At first, after Anthony went away, she had enjoyed her freedom, her independence of another's likes and dislikes; but in time, as the novelty wore off, it had palled.

What *did* she want? She must find something absorbing to do. She must try to get a position—some such work as she done before her marriage. It was unthinkable that she could face another Christmas stark alone—for she had even let Mina go home to her numerous Polish family until the day after the holiday.

By this time next year the divorce would of course be all over with, and she would be free to do as she pleased. For some reason, however, the thought carried no elation. The married habit was hard to break, she mused, even when love had gone.

The florist's delivery car drew up at the door—the wreath for Hugh's grave. She had meant to take it to the cemetery on Christmas morning, but the afternoon was only beginning to draw in. There was still plenty of time now, and doing something—anything, even this, in such tragic contrast to last year—might serve to quiet her inexplicably quivering nerves.

## II

A FRESH snow, light and powdery, was beginning to fall as Agatha piloted her little car through the wide suburban streets and out into the sparsely settled section on the other side of

town, to where, tall and gray in the gathering twilight, loomed the stone gateway to the tranquil city of the dead. The breeze had sunk, the snow fell straight. A single pale star swam white in the cold green sea above the sunset.

The place was almost deserted at this hour on Christmas Eve. Only one other car was parked at the entrance—a powerful blue roadster that must have been standing there for some time, for the snow had settled thickly and evenly over the top and on the running board. Her heart quickened with sympathy toward the unknown owner, as it always did to the many strangers who, like herself, made their sorrowful pilgrimages here. Carefully freeing the wreath from its wrappings, she locked her car and passed in through the gate.

Hugh's grave was on the far side of a little rise of ground, and to reach it his mother usually walked directly across the grass from a certain point. This route was shorter than the sweeping circle of the main drive, which stretched like a ribbon of white into the deepening gloom, the footmarks of that one other pilgrim almost obliterated by the falling flakes. As she turned off upon the white-mantled turf, her throat was aching, though her eyes felt hot and dry. How utterly still it was in the windless dusk—so still that she could almost hear the silently descending snow!

As she neared the top of the little slope, she became aware of an eerie, diffused brightness, very soft, rising from the other side. She was not easily frightened, but somehow—*here*, and at this time!

With fast-beating heart she tiptoed up the hill. Surely the strange light was coming from the direction of the spot where Hugh lay! A few more steps, and, smothering a frightened cry, she slipped behind the shelter of a large monument.

At the foot of Hugh's grave stood

a Christmas tree—a little tree, not more than three feet high, on every branch of which there gleamed not a coldly decorative colored bulb, but a lighted candle, burning warm and bright, the living flames stirring gently in the almost motionless air. Dazzled by the sudden illumination in the deepening dusk, she could at first see only the tree, as she shrank trembling behind the monument; but as her eyes became adjusted, she was at last able to discern beyond it, kneeling bareheaded in the snow—Anthony!

As she stared in bewilderment, he raised his head, and the soft light of the glowing tree revealed a face so worn and tired and white that Agatha barely suppressed a cry of dismay as she felt herself physically sinking under the sudden wave of self-reproach that rolled over her. Beneath it all, warm like the wavering flames of the little candles, was the knowledge that her first impulse, barely checked in time, upon recognizing the broad shoulders and obstinately curly head, had been to rush out from her hiding place and clasp him in her arms!

For once in her impulsive life, however, she had been able to check an impulse. She mustn't do that, much as she longed to. She mustn't let Anthony know that she had stumbled upon this sacred moment of his, lest he should think her moved by pity or passing emotion.

In this blaze of terrible enlightenment she realized the essential truth of the old, old saying, "Still waters run deep." Anthony's undemonstrativeness and inarticulateness covered depths that she herself did not have, emotions of which she was probably incapable. All the time that she had been accusing him of hardness and coldness, he had been hurt—hurt worse, perhaps, than she had been. Anthony never could, and never would, say anything, while she, without thinking, continually said things that she didn't mean and couldn't even remember afterward.

The little lights grew blurred and danced before her tear-dimmed eyes. Could she possibly make up for her blindness, her selfishness, and—yes, she must admit it—the dramatization of her own grief at the expense of the father of her boy?

No, Anthony being what he was, she must not go to him now. She must get away quickly, for there was not much time for all that she had to do. Thank God, she knew what to do!

The lights were between her and Anthony, bright enough to blind his eyes to the darkness beyond them and to cover the slight movement made by her cautious departure. As she backed slowly away, Anthony coughed—a hard, ugly cough which told more plainly than any words that it had been fastened upon him for months, like the horrible one of three years ago. That meant filling the old prescription which had helped him then. Agatha could still remember the queer number—44,444.

Once below the top of the slope, Agatha Wynne ran through the twilight and the falling snow as she had not run since she was a little girl. The Christmas wreath was still in her hand—not a cemetery wreath, for she never put mournful-looking things on Hugh's grave—a real Christmas wreath, except for ribbons. Three yards it would take, she calculated, as she laid it on the seat—wide ribbon, expensive ribbon. Hugh had no need of it, for surely he was safe and happy somewhere; but Hugh's father—once again, could she ever make it up?

"God help me to do it!" she whispered, her eyes on the lonely, snow-shrouded car, waiting there in front of her own.

Straight into town she drove, to the section of busy markets and tempting, brilliantly lighted stores, of Christmas crowds, usually so distasteful, but tonight so heart-warming and human, for everybody was busy doing something for somebody else. What a

blessing it was that she had cashed a check of respectable proportions that morning!

A turkey, just right in size, young, plump, with a breastbone that yielded to pressure in a most exemplary way; oysters, cranberries, celery, crisp white endive—there was grapefruit at home for Anthony's pet salad, wasn't there?—salted nuts and crystallized ginge.; a cauliflower of incredible delicacy and perfection—one after another, the white-coated market man piled them into the little car.

"Bet your best fellow's coming to see you at the last minute!" said he, as Agatha, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, made a place for herself on the heaped seat.

"He is," she answered shakily. "You've guessed just right about that!"

Now a fruit cake from Elizabeth Ann's shop, rich and black, the top entirely covered with big red cherries, and nuts peeping invitingly through the sides. She could make a better one herself from her great-grandmother's recipe, but there wasn't time, and Anthony's rather curious favorite dessert of ice cream served on a slice of fruit cake must be ready. Some ribbon next, scarlet as the holly berries, eight inches wide—sinful extravagance, of course, but what her door lacked in timeliness it must make up in splendor. Anthony had always loved Christmas wreaths, and would never consent to take them down until they were hopelessly withered. A poinsettia now—one with many brilliant leaves, its pot gayly covered with bright crape paper.

This left only the candles to be provided, and there is just one place in which to find the perfect Christmas candle—the unassuming ten-cent store. It is a tall, thick candle of bright red wax, with a coarse wick which produces a large, warm flame. Perhaps it is because of the very cheapness of its make-up, but after it has burned for a

little time it looks softly transparent for a couple of inches from the top, the epitome of Christmas cheer.

Parking near by was out of the question, but Agatha, undaunted, left her car at the distant point, which was the best she could do, and wormed her way through the surging crowds. As she passed through the swing doors of her objective, she wondered for a dismayed instant whether it would be possible to move at all; but at last she had her six candles—one for each of the four front windows, and two for the new place that she had thought of. She bought flat dark green holders, too, for she had no idea where the old ones might be. The cough prescription she had left at her own druggist's on her way into town. That would be all now—and home!

### III

How depressing the house looked, a dark, dismal blot on the cheery street! Letting herself into the warm darkness, she did not even take time to remove her outer garments before setting four of the candles in their windows, lighting them, fastening the great wreath of pine and bittersweet to the brass knocker, and tying the rich silk ribbons with trembling fingers. Better, much better, she thought, as she stepped backward down the path to look at the result. It was just like the Baylises'!

Softly and sweetly on the crisp air sounded seven strokes from the clock on the tower of St. John's. Time was passing; she must hurry. A good thing that she had given Mina a holiday, for she was a far better cook herself. Anthony had always said so, and she knew it to be true as she set to work in the kitchen.

The turkey had to be stuffed to perfection, trussed, and made ready for the oven. She made a squash pie, spicy, fragrant, and brown, and a square white pan of cream caramels. She set the glowing poinsettia in its



place on the dining room table, and the cough medicine bottle ready on a plate on the sideboard. Everything was done, everything was in order. The house was still, and the big living room was warm in the light of the steady candle flames.

For a moment Agatha knelt by the heavy blue velvet curtains at the doorway. She and Anthony were still the same two individuals as last year, with their different viewpoints, their different manners, their different temperaments; but two things had changed. She understood him now, something that she had never before taken the trouble to attempt. That was one great change, and the other was that she had learned that she loved him, deeply and unreservedly, and she knew, with that clarity of inner knowledge sometimes vouchsafed to us, that Anthony loved her. With that to go on, surely one need never fail.

Muted by closed doors and windows, but sweet and clear, came nine strokes from the church clock.

Rising from her knees, Agatha lighted the two remaining candles—one for each side of the porch steps—in order that the flames might establish themselves and burn down a little while she telephoned to the club where Anthony was sure to be. He disliked the usual run of hotels, and always searched out a college club in any large city where he chanced to be; and whenever she and Hugh had gone away, he had stayed at this one. With a trembling hand she took down the receiver and called the number.

So certain had she been of finding him that the clerk's "Not registered, madam," was like a physical blow in the face.

"No, madam, we aren't expecting him," the functionary added. "No reservation has been made in that name."

Numb with the shock of frustrated hope, she returned the receiver to its hook. Had she built her plans for

happy reunion on a foundation of—nothing? Slowly and methodically, in alphabetical order, she called the city's three possible hotels, but in each case the answer was the same:

"Not registered—no reservation."

So it had all been to no purpose! Why had she been so foolish as to count with such certainty upon Anthony's being at the club? Why should he wish to stay overnight in a place that was no longer his home, that could hold no memories for him save bitter ones? No, he would never care to see Agatha again. After he had burned out the little tree, there would be nothing left for him to do but go—where? Probably he would drive all night through the snow and cold—and with that cough, too!

Agatha walked slowly into the hall, where on the table, ready to carry out, the two candles burned warm and clear. Her heart was bruised and sore with disappointment, but a courage that had never before been a part of her shone in her eyes. She would be unable, after all, to repossess Anthony in this happy, uncomplicated way; but no matter how hard the task, she would succeed!

Only a coward extinguishes her Christmas lights when her plans miscarry, she thought, as she opened the door and took up the heavy holders, feeling the caressing warmth of the little flames close to her face. Stepping out into the windless night, she set them down, one on each of the flat stone squares that topped the steps, centering them with meticulous exactness in their beds of soft snow.

Suddenly, though she heard no sound, some inner compulsion made her turn; and with a stab of joy so exquisite as to be utter pain, she saw, as it came silently to a halt at the curb, a long, powerful roadster, dark, snow-blanketed.

With an inarticulate little cry she ran down the path—into Anthony's arms.

# Winged Death

By Don Cameron Shafer



*The amazing adventure of a Kazak hunter who was rescued from imminent peril by a winged creature ten times larger than the largest eagle*



WITHIN the dark, windowless tent the Kazak woman had discarded the familiar tribal headdress of white, and stood before her man wearing only a loose-fitting gown of cotton print, with her bare brown feet in Chinese cloth shoes. She was like a slender, accusing figure of bronze as she stretched out her right hand in anger.

"You have spent all?" she cried.

"Ay-yah," confessed the man.

"And for another worthless bird?"

"Yes, I spent all for this *berkoot*, except what went to buy a roll of figured Kashmir cloth to assuage the tem-

per of a certain nagging woman."

"Famine sharpens the tongue," she said in softer voice, and not without intimate knowledge of the subject. "What matters how bright the garments without, if there be hunger within?"

"It is true," admitted he, "that the other *berkoot* was a thief, a worthless vulture, no more than half tamed; but this one is a very fine bird—the largest and strongest I have ever seen."

"In this place of crowds," she argued petulantly, "there is no meal, no meat, no fuel—nothing for those who spend all in folly!"

Her man, sitting on a worn sheep-

skin thrown over an inlaid wooden stool before the dying fire of dried camel's dung, writhed uneasily with guilt and shame, but still managed to find reassuring pride and pleasure in his purchase. True, he had paid an enormous price for his big falcon, but he held that the expenditure was justified.

He was a middle-aged, medium-sized brown man with high cheek bones and a thin, hooked nose, dressed in a quilted coat, loose and long-sleeved, over a dun woolen smock and baggy cotton breeches. His coarse black hair was cropped short at the neck, and the leanness of his brown face was accentuated by a scant beard of jet bristles.

"Even in a torrent of useless words the truth comes out of you," he said, applying a lighted straw from the fire to the blackened bowl of his long-stemmed copper pipe. "That there is nothing to eat is the very reason why we should rejoice in the possession of such a wonderful *berkoot*."

"Surely you must know that here at Kundersinct, in the season of the summer fair, there is no hunting for any one," returned the woman. "Perhaps you are planning to eat the bird—we have nothing else."

"I would as soon bite off my own right arm!" her husband cried in a loud voice, as if to shout down the indisputable fact of her argument. "A fool should I be, indeed, if I didn't know that there is nothing to hunt on these plains of hot sand. We have been here long, but not long enough, fortunately, to take root. We are not tied to this place as a tame monkey of Urg is tethered to a tree. We shall return to the grassy steppes, where a free man can exist without a string of copper cash or a bundle of skins to barter for his living."

"Then let us go," the woman pleaded eagerly. "Poor folks have no friends in any city!"

"Already am I weary of this place,"

declared the man, reluctant to admit that he had done a foolish thing, but well knowing that he could not stay in the camp without anything to trade. "It begins to stink of crowded people, instead of the familiar and wholly delightful fragrance of camels and horses."

"It is not good to stay too long in any one spot," agreed his wife, with the inherited instinct of a nomad people. "Let us go!"

"Take down the *yurt*," he ordered, knocking out his pipe. "I will go and get the riding and carrying animals for our journey."

He stepped outdoors into the narrow street of a city of tents—hundreds of *yurts*, or domed felt huts, very like the curious brown spawn of some giant mushroom growth, huddled on the barren, sandy plain. It was the temporary city of a primitive nomad people. Its crooked alleyways were crowded with restless Turkomans, wearing gaudy blouses of red and blue; swart tribesmen from the Tarim Desert, in marmot skins and camel's-hair cloth; still wilder Kalkas from the Mongolian steppes, bristling with ancient firelocks and bronze-hafted knives; Gulchas in furs, and Tajaks in almost nothing but their weapons.

This motley horde of half savage buyers had gathered from hundreds of miles around, from mountain and plain and desert, to meet the traders from distant manufacturing centers in the annual summer bazaar at Kundersinct. The nomad hunters came to barter hides and furs, elk antlers in the velvet, dried forest mushrooms, tiger whiskers, and the beautiful skins of snowy leopards, for the alluring wares of Samarkand, of Bokhara, of Kashmir, of China, Persia, and India. Even a few precious things dribbled down over the mountains from that greater civilization whose very existence was unknown to most of them.

Kundersinct was a city of tents that would vanish with the first cold breath

of autumn, when the spenders' cash and skins were gone, when the buyers' bales were empty. It was a trade city of necessity, for in the nomad life of those scattered people of the eastern steppes there are no villages worthy of the name, no agriculture, no manufacturing. Consequently there are no stores or trading posts, and nothing can be bought or sold except during these annual fairs at the great communal summer camps.

The Kazak man whose purse was empty walked down the narrow street as proudly as if he had plenty of everything. He pretended a great interest in each attraction, but he carefully ignored the finger-polished wooden bowls of the collectors of money, and was deaf to their curses and jeers as he stalked hurriedly away.

The streets were crowded with strange folk, shouting a babel of tongues. Those with something left to spend gathered about the street fakirs, idly curious, easily amused, watching the knife throwers, shouting wagers on the trained wrestlers, showering coppers at the dancers. Everywhere shopkeepers droned the merits of their wares or haggled in a loud voice with customers.

"This place has become an offense to the nose as well as to the eyes and ears," declared the Kazak man, hurrying on, having lost his interest together with his cash. "I will go back where I can get a breath of good air and drink water that has not been kept too long in a moldy goatskin!"

In the darkened interior of the *yurt* he had left behind, the Kazak woman was packing their simple household furnishings into brass-bound traveling chests and heavy camel's-hair bags. She was eager to go.

"When you grow up," she said, addressing their little son, "I hope you will become a trader. They always get everything in the end."

"When I become a man," the boy returned loyally, "I shall be a great

hunter, like father, and own the best-trained *berkoots* in the land!"

"Then you will know hunger!"

## II

WHEN the worn sheepskins were rolled and lashed and the simple furniture packed for transport, the Kazak woman began to take down the house. First she unfastened the wide felt strips from the wooden framework. The basket structure easily came apart into sections, and was collapsible, to be folded and packed, each stick in its proper place. With skillful and practiced hands she had her task completed by the time her man returned from the outskirts of the camp with their animals.

They began the task of loading.

"Ballat, you devil's disowned pup!" cried the man, jerking at the cord that passed through the wet nose of one of the camels.

With curses and blows he beat two of the grotesque, protesting beasts to their calloused knees for the loads. When they were loaded, and had heaved upright again on their knobby legs, the man mounted a small but evil-tempered gray stallion. Then, sitting a high Mongol saddle, he proudly led the little caravan out of the city.

His gesture was princely, though his purse was empty, for on his leather-guarded right fist, for all envious eyes to see, rode the wonderful hunting *berkoot* that had cost him so dear—a great golden eagle, truly one of the largest eagles in all Asia, hooded with carved Morocco leather and belled with tinkling silver.

"Now will I prove to you, unbelieving woman, the worth of my bargain!"

"Never was there greater need," said she. "There is nothing whatever to eat, and our man child—"

"I am not hungry," lied the boy stoutly. "I would rather have a good hunting eagle than any food!"

"You talk like a grown man!" ex-



claimed his mother scornfully, and yet not without pride in her son.

"Put over the cooking pot," laughed the father in all confidence. "We shall soon have meat!"

The *yurt* had been set up beside a shallow pool of stagnant water, churned to yellow mud around the edges by the feet of camels and horses that had stopped there to drink. In all that rolling, gray, sandy distance there was not a tree, not a green thing, nothing of life but some scraggly bushes armed with thorns, leafless and forlorn, and a few hardy, dust-covered shrubs on which the tired horses and camels browsed.

"There is nothing to hunt here," sighed the woman, gazing hungrily at the empty pot in her hand. "It is a barren land accursed with heat and famine!"

"No matter how devoid of life it may appear to us, this wonderful falcon will find something, somewhere," the man argued. "His strong wings will carry him to great heights, where his all seeing eyes will search the distance and behold everything. There is always a hare somewhere. Build a fire—get the pot boiling!"

She struck a spark with flint and steel and blew it into a tiny flame beneath a heap of thorns, as the man hurried to fly his newly acquired hunting eagle.

"Up, up, Kimba!"

At the sound of his excited voice the hooded bird roused from its dumpy stupor. Its muscular body stirred, stretching upright on its powerful legs. Its broad wings half unfolded, quivering with eagerness, and it gave a shrill, screaming cry.

Truly it was a huge and powerful eagle. Its short, thick legs were nearly as large as the man's wrists, and its sharp black talons spread wider than the extended fingers of his brown hands, now busy with the leather thong that held the giant bird captive to its wooden perch.

"*Hei, hei, Kimba!* Now is the time to prove that I did not waste the prince's ransom I paid for you!"

A great armed foot raised and reached anxiously for the man's forearm as the blindfolded bird clutched at the leather-guarded sleeve and mounted, fluttering for its balance. It was so heavy that it took all the man's strength to hold the big eagle out at arm's length. He talked to it as hunters talk to favorite dogs, certain that it understood every word.

"There is nothing to eat, my Kimba, and we must have meat. When we are hungry, you also know famine. Go, go! Fly high, look carefully, circle wide and far, but kill, kill!"

He snatched off the tasseled leather hood that blinded and subdued the vicious bird, revealing jewel-bright, cruel eyes—eyes without pity, without mercy for any living thing.

"Go!"

He ran a few steps and launched the big bird into the air with a skillful toss.

Unhooded, awing, off for the hunt, this was a different bird—no longer the dumpy, bedraggled, blindfolded slave of thong and perch, but king of the air again, screaming with delight, rejoicing with the thrill of flight, beating the hot desert air with mighty pinions, fanning itself quickly aloft. Soon the invisible air currents above whirled it higher and higher on motionless, soaring wings, growing ever smaller and smaller in the watching eyes of the hunter, until it was lost entirely in the hazy distance of the glowing west, where the day was retiring in golden splendor.

"You never will see that bird again," said the woman. "It will fly straight back to its former owner, and then you will be out of pocket, as well as out of your head!"

"To hear you talk, woman, one would think that I had never seen a hunting eagle before, and had never dealt with slippery traders at Kunder-sinct!" cried the man, indignant at the

very suggestion, but inwardly feeling that it might be true. "I am not one to be cheated by that ancient Chino trick of selling homing birds to country fools. If you were at all observing, or knew half as much about *berkoots* as you do about words, you would understand that the broad white band in this noble bird's tail marks it as an eagle of the northern mountains. That is why it is larger and stronger than any southern eagle, because of the hard weather in those cold heights. It is many flights from home, and even the keen eyes of an eagle cannot see the skin tent of a Manchur hunter through a mountain range!"

"Kimba will bring back a pheasant," said the boy, without ever a doubt.

"Or a kid," added the father. "Put over the cooking pot!"

"When I see the meat," the woman said doubtfully.

Like most trained hunting dogs, so long dependent upon man for a living that they would starve to death in a country full of game if left to hunt by themselves, this trained eagle could not fend for itself. Taken from the nest when a dependent fledgling, it had never learned how to rend and tear, or to feed itself. Every morsel of food had to be dropped into its beak by its owner.

Consequently, however far it might fly, it always brought back to its master all the small game it killed. It knew no other home than the wooden perch beside the family *yurt*, and no other life than captivity.

For a long time man and boy stood there, staring at the lighter west where day was swiftly descending in a golden flood of reflected light. They strained their dark eyes, searching the sky eagerly for the tiny speck that would announce the home-coming of their eagle and the evening meal; but the minutes ran on and on into the purple dusk of night, as the sun drew itself down behind the desert rim, and they saw nothing.

At last even the optimistic heart of the man was stricken with fear and chagrin and grew small within his breast. He felt sure that he had been robbed in this exorbitant purchase.

"May the devils of pain torture that cheating Manchur trader!" he began hoarsely. "May evil descend—"

"See, see!" interrupted the boy, with keener eyes. "It comes!"

"A gnat before the eyes," warned the father, "looks like an eagle in the distance."

"It is our *berkoot*—it is Kimba!"

The father's anxious eyes followed the boy's directing finger until he, too, could see, low against the greenish evening sky, a tiny black dot. It grew larger and larger, it flattened out, it became a bird.

"It is Kimba!" cried the hunter. "Our eagle returns with a kill—now we shall eat!"

While the eagle was still a long way off, their ears tingled to its piercing hunting call, heralding success. The slow and measured beat of its huge wings, now plainly visible, attested that it carried a load. Then out of the heights above and before them, out of the darkening sky where the first large stars were lit, the bird plunged earthward, headlong on half folded wings, in a hissing, roaring, terrific dive; but just before dashing to the earth at their feet, its broad wings opened to break the force of its swift descent.

The man ran forward, shouting, and caught it on his outstretched arm just as the limp body of a desert hare dropped on the ground.

"What did I tell you?" he cried with joy. "This is the largest and best trained *berkoot* under the roof of the world—and it is mine!"

### III

BEFORE the invention of the fowling piece kings and queens and princes of the royal blood, lords and ladies all, fared forth with trained gerfalcons on their gloved fists, while beaters and

dogs threshed the coverts before them to raise the game for the swift hawks to kill. There was no other way to strike down small game in flight.

In time, however, the sport of falconry vanished before the noisy shotguns of the hunters, except among primitive people of far distant lands, living beyond the borders of civilization, and too poor for firearms. In the wilds of central Asia it has been maintained and developed by stern necessity, game being scarce, until the largest eagles are caught and trained for the hunt. Well-trained *berkoots* are permitted to hunt by themselves, flying where they please, often absent for hours at a time, but always returning with whatever game they kill. Only when hunting larger game does the hunter follow on horseback to take part in the actual killing.

Twice a day, as the little caravan progressed across the desert toward the distant steppes, the big eagle was flown—once early in the morning, while the camels were being loaded, and again in the evening, when the tent was being set up for the night.

The next morning the bird was back in a few minutes with a speckled brown pheasant.

"You see!" exclaimed the man proudly. "It is as I said."

"For once!"

"With this wonderful bird all we have to do is to sit down and wait for our dinner."

"I am used to waiting!" said the nagging wife.

That evening the bird brought back a large fox, the soft fur of which could be saved for trade, though the strong flesh went into the cooking pot, along with everything else they could find to eat in that land of famine.

"When we are back on the grassy plains near the mountains, where there is plenty of game," boasted the man. "This eagle shall make us rich!"

"It would be nice never to know want or hunger," the woman sighed.

"With this bird I shall get many fine pelts of the gray mountain wolves to barter for horses and camels. We shall feed fat on the tender flesh of mountain lambs and exchange their skins for barley meal and honey."

"You cannot hunt wolves with an eagle!"

"I can with this one," he argued. "Never was there such another eagle—none so large, so strong, so intelligent. It is the finest eagle in the world. It will hold a big wolf at bay until I can shoot it with my gun."

"Surely it is large enough," she admitted, "but—"

"And brave enough," he boasted. "There is no animal it dares not attack."

"Ho!" laughed she. "You forget the leopards in the mountains and the tigers in the forest of Kulth!"

"Tigers—of course. I doubt not Kimba would fly into the very face of the largest tiger," he insisted with all an owner's pride. "It could slash out the big cat's eyes, and then I—"

"Then you would lose your eagle and your life!"

#### IV

THE grassy steppes stretched away in endless waves of rolling upland to the ragged profile of purple mountains—a treeless, wind-swept plain, yellow-green now with ripe grass that rippled like water in the stiff morning breeze.

"This is home!" shouted the Kazak hunter. "This is life!"

None but a wild man, sitting a half wild horse with a hunting eagle on his arm, could look around in that empty and desolate landscape and rejoice. The hunter was alone on a grassy hill-top, with the wind whistling through his black hair and whipping at his faded garments. The *yurt* was but a solitary black dot in the dun distance before him. Mountains rose behind him, fringing the very skies with jagged white peaks—an almost insurmountable barrier of naked rock, up which

the lean green fingers of forest stretched as if to pull them down, as trees and wind and water pull down all mountains in time.

"Now we shall enjoy some real hunting!" he cried, addressing the hooded eagle on his arm, which, in turn, was supported by a crotched stick extending down to a leather socket in his right stirrup, for no man could hold such a heavy falcon on his fist for long without support. "Now we shall see what kind of a hunter you are!"

It was not a rich game country. Ages and ages before, Mongol hunters had swept it bare to the very mountains. They had slain the aurochs, the giant deer, and the antelope that once fed in great herds on the grassy plains; and now all the big game left had taken refuge in the mountains.

High among the inaccessible rocks were a few herds of ibex and mountain sheep. In the green fastness of the forest were elk and small deer, and out on the plain were a few antelope—all more or less safe from ordinary native hunters, who knew nothing of modern firearms and lived in wholesome fear of the big cats lurking in the cover.

"You will find big game, Kimba, and hold it until I come with my gun!"

His gun!

Fastened to the saddle with a loop of leather was primitive man's first successful attempt to make a better weapon than the bow and arrow—a cross-gun, with a quiver of iron-headed bolts. The short steel bow was morticed into a straight wooden stock, so that it could be held against the shoulder to be sighted. This stock was fitted with a simple trigger to hold the taut bowstring until the crude weapon could be fired. The wooden barrel was grooved to guide the iron-headed, short-hafted, unfeathered bolt in straight flight to the mark.

"A *berkoot* that will hunt hares and pheasants is no uncommon bird," the hunter told himself; "but with this one I shall get furs worth a price!"

Galloping along the ridge, he saw the flash of a startled antelope's hurried flight. He pulled the blindfold from the eagle's eyes.

"Look, Kimba, look!" he cried, pointing at the running animal. "Go get it!"

From the running pony's back he launched the big eagle into the air like a monoplane from a mechanical catapult. As the bird spiraled upward the hunter spurred on after the racing game.

A minute later the eagle dived like a huge arrow from the sky, and there was a blur of fanning wings as it fastened to the running antelope's rump. The buck was but a small one, on slender legs, without means of defense, depending entirely upon flight to escape its enemies. Now it screamed and leaped about wildly, to escape the gripping talons; but it was dragged down, threshing in the sand, to await the hunter spurring up.

He threw himself from his horse, overanxious, the ancient gun in his hands. The steel bow was so powerful that he had to stand on it with both feet and exert all his strength on the cord to pull it back far enough for the trigger. This accomplished, he laid an iron-headed bolt into the groove of the stock and began to circle the struggling pair, alert for a shot that would not by any chance injure his valuable bird.

From a distance of ten feet he fired. With the harsh twang of the bowstring the bolt thudded against the dun hide, and a bit of dust puffed from both sides of the stricken animal, indicating that the shaft had gone completely through its slender body and into the sand beyond.

With the limp body of the slain antelope lashed behind him on the saddle, while the eagle, hooded again, rode on his supported arm, the hunter headed on toward the mountains.

"There will be foxes and wolves yonder," said he. "I shall have plenty



of fur to barter, as well as an abundance of food to eat!"

A red fox ran scrambling up the rocky slope to his right, disturbed from its noonday nap atop a sunny rock. The winged death struck from above and behind, so quick and fierce that even this nimble animal could not dodge.

Beside a small pool a pair of wild geese were feeding, to rise noisily as the hunter approached. The eagle caught the gander in mid-air before they had winged half a mile.

"This *berkoot* surely will make me rich!" exulted the hunter, as his horse grew heavier with food. "I shall not be content until I have tried it on a wolf."

Wolves there were, as he knew, hiding somewhere among the rocks. Alert, watchful, suspicious, they slipped away unseen at the first sight or sound of his approaching horse.

"I will leave the finding of those gray devils to you," he said, addressing the eagle. "Go get me a wolf!"

He tossed the bird into the air again, without indicating that game had flushed, and the trained *berkoot* understood. Bursting with pride, he watched it soaring away above him.

"Of a surety that bird was trained by a master," he said in frank admiration. "It stays close, it waits for me, but it sees everything. Surely such a bird will find a wolf and hold it until I come!"

As he rode on, his dark eyes were ever turned upward, never looking to the right or the left, never watching behind, forgetting in his eagerness and pride the caution that every hunter should remember when approaching the dangerous forest of Kulth.

"If men could only fly like that," he thought enviously, as his pony scrambled over the rocks, "then I could hunt tigers and white leopards and soon make myself rich!"

Scrubby brush grew in the hollows, tall reeds stretched up beside boggy

swamps. Steadily he drew nearer the mountains, where there was more cover. The half dried grass grew high and rank. The ripe leaves of birch thickets were slowly turning yellow, and the bright sunlight laced the leaf-strewn earth with long shadows of limb and trunk, black as ink. Yellow sunlight and black shadow—yellow fur with black stripes—an invisible cloak against such a blending background.

At the edge of a thicket something moved ever so slightly, and two great round yellow eyes watched the unsuspecting hunter.

## V

WHERE the hunting eagle led the man must needs follow. High above his head the great bird swung in wide, lazy circles, on motionless wings. Its head hung low between powerful shoulders, its bright jewel eyes searching the earth floor with telescopic vision. This time it did not swoop to hare or pheasant; it ignored the whistling marmots and the clucking grouse. Well trained and experienced, this intelligent *berkoot* knew that when the hunter followed so close behind it was supposed to find larger game.

A rough country now, growing ever rougher, and it was not easy to follow the eagle. The hunter rode a tough and sure-footed mountain pony. Though he took every advantage of the terrain and ever sought the easiest going, still it was necessary to climb rocky hills, to slide down into steep ravines, and to climb laboriously out again. He picked his way among great rocks, followed slippery stream beds, and plunged through dense thickets. Intent upon his going, fearful lest the eagle might get out of sight, he never saw the slinking yellow and black shadow keeping pace with him, step by step, as relentlessly as his own shadow in the sunlight.

In a deep valley which seemed to split the very mountain ahead he saw the soaring eagle stop, holding its po-

sition in the upper air with flapping wings.

"*Hei!*" he cried. "Game at last!"

The eagle pitched suddenly forward and fell like a winged thunderbolt in a long, slanting dive to earth, vanishing from his sight behind the trees ahead.

"It must be a wolf!"

The striking eagle screamed a loud cry for help as the hunter spurred forward. He raced up an open glade, grass-carpeted between scattered trees, too excited for caution, and never noted that the tall grass along the edge of the thicket behind him rippled and swayed to the swift passage of some large but invisible body. Thrilling with this crisis of the long hunt, he raced through the trees, to see a snarling gray shape crouching against the face of a broken rock, menaced by the swooping eagle.

"A wolf! Hold him—I come!"

At the sound of his voice the gray wolf leaped away, dashing up the steep, but the vicious bird was instantly in its face with slashing claws and snapping beak, swooping, striking, screaming.

It was but a small Asiatic wolf, and yet a formidable beast when at bay. It leaped and fought, snapping at the empty air, unable to escape; but the trained eagle never got too close, swerving just before the ivory-rimmed jaws closed upon it. By the very frenzy of its attack, however, it held the frantic wolf crouching under a ledge of rock, facing the man, with red lips drawn snarling back over white fangs.

"Hold him, Kimba!"

Leaping from his pony with the ancient cross-gun in his hands, the hunter hastily pulled the bow cord back into the trigger notch and laid a bolt into the groove of the wooden stock. When the eagle zoomed up again out of the way he sighted and pulled.

With the twang of the bowstring and the thud of the heavy bolt against

the wolf's body, the eagle above him screamed a loud warning. Then the bird dropped like a stone from a catapult—not at the dying wolf threshing among the rocks, but in a slanting, whistling plunge over the hunter's head and behind him.

The man wheeled instantly, suddenly conscious that he had been too careless in such a dangerous place, and as he looked behind him he was frozen in his tracks with terror. Paralyzed, inarticulate, unable to move, wide-eyed with the fear of death, for a moment he stood helpless, as a great yellow and black tiger charged out of the cover in low, running bounds.

## VI

THE falling eagle never swerved from its swift descending course until it was in the charging tiger's very face, raking at the beast's blazing yellow eyes with its sharp talons. In the sheer courage of this bold and audacious bird the man found strength.

For all the eagle's brave attack the tiger never hesitated, never turned its broad head. Its furry lips were drawn back from its yellow fangs for the kill as it charged home; but just as it reared high, with huge paws extended to strike the man down, its glistening claws unsheathed, the hunter leaped aside.

The eagle swooped again, to blind the big cat with buffeting wings. The terrified pony, wheeling at the noise and catching its first glimpse of the charging tiger, bolted past the hunter. His frantic hands caught its mane, and he leaped and swung upon his running steed's back.

Not even a fast horse is swift enough to escape the terrific speed of a charging tiger in the first few hundred yards. Whirling about, the big cat was after them in long, leaping bounds, driving forward with powerful leg and body muscles, paying no attention to the screaming eagle, and rapidly overhauling the fleeing pony.

The hunter knew that nothing but a miracle could save him now. The pony was not fast enough, and any moment, in the madness of its frantic flight over that broken ground, it might stumble and fall. He was alone and unarmed. The eagle was brave enough, but wholly impotent against such a formidable beast.

"No *berkoot* is large enough to stop a tiger," he muttered, as his one and only hope vanished. "Gods of Kazan, help me now!"

Almost with the very words there came a loud roaring in his ears. The sound grew louder and louder. It was many times noisier than the whistling swoop of the largest *berkoot*, and yet it was just such a sound as a striking eagle makes.

The hunter glanced over his shoulder, to see a great winged bird swooping down upon him—such a bird as he had never dreamed existed, the very Roc of fable. Then, as the aerial monster nose-dived toward the fleeing tiger, he distinctly heard the roar of guns, and was astonished to see that two men rode upon the back of this giant *berkoot*.

All this he saw in one hasty glance, and then the racing pony, leaping aside from the new terror of the air, stumbled among the broken rocks and fell, throwing its rider headlong.

## VII

"OURS is a good bird, but it is not the largest *berkoot* in the world, as I

thought," said the Kazak hunter, waking from a long darkness, back in the *yurt* again. "I was mistaken about that. I did not know how much larger these birds grow on the other side of the mountains, where the Russians have their fortress."

"There are always rumors of wonderful things over there," soothed the woman. "Rest now, my husband."

"This *berkoot* that I saw with my own eyes had ten times the wing span of the largest eagle, and two Cossack Russian warriors, with guns, rode upon its back."

"*Hei-yah!*"

"I speak in all truth," he declared. "It was large enough to terrify a tiger."

"You have had a hard fall," said she. "Your head will be all right again in the morning."

"I tell you it is true," said he. "If the Russian riders hadn't missed that tiger, as it fled before their giant *berkoot*, I would have its skin to back my words!"

"You had better not tell that story to any one," she replied, smiling, "without the tiger skin."

"Some day," said he, dropping back to rest, "there will be *berkoots* like that for sale at the annual fair in Kundersinct. Then I shall have one, if it takes every camel and horse we own!"

"Then what will we ride?"

"The *berkoot*," he said weakly, "and we shall hunt tigers from the air!"



## ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS

POOR apes of Nature's loveliness!  
Convincing though you first may be,  
A moment—then you show your dress  
As dyed and woven mockery!

From some young cheek, perhaps, was drained  
The flush your petals have assumed;  
And all the beauty you have gained,  
Hers might have been, could she have bloomed.

Virginia Whitmore

# Gang Ways

By Trent



" Say, pop, how many saps must I hold up before I can join the gang ? "

" Aw, be yer age, son. Youse is too little to be trusted wit' a machine gun ! "



# Bob Davis Recalls

*A story of a  
June bride  
and a silver  
card tray*

By Bob Davis



IF I were called upon to summon out of the past the most exquisitely sentimental moment that it had been my good fortune to witness I could unfold a tale.

Why not for the sake of its rare beauty and its charm give it existence here?

The scene of that great occasion was West Seventy-Second Street. Time, the month of June. Sufficient to say that a red streamer carpet ran down a brownstone stoop, out across the pavement to the curb. From a procession of automobiles lords and ladies of high estate were being assisted by smart chauffeurs. The spirit of Mendelssohn shared the glory of a June day. Representatives of the proletariat paused at intervals, drank in the distillations that ensue when pomp passes and moved on with varying expressions of satisfaction and acquiescence.

Any pedestrian moving along that



SHE KISSED  
HIM TENDERLY  
UPON THE  
TEMPLE

historic thoroughfare, provided, of course, his ears were attuned to the music of the spheres, could have caught the echoes of the wedding march and sensed romance in the making.

The ceremony is over; from within echo mirth and laughter. The bride, radiant beyond words, leans lightly upon the arm of her young lord, who

aspires to the heights and longs to be away on the journey through life with her as his special charge. The parents of the bride, an only child, fleck away the tears that are supposed to be born of joy and press her tenderly to their breasts. The heavy perfume of orange blossoms commingles with the delicate aroma of banked roses competing with sprays of lilies of the valley. The flower and chivalry of the town are massed about the twain. At the entrance to the drawing-room, erect and immaculate, stands the old family butler, servitor of a lifetime. The bars on his wide revers meet as the base of two triangles at a single gold button on his chest. He stands motionless, as one guarding an Egyptian tomb. But he could hear under the snug blue coat the beating of his own heart.

The company passes to a smaller reception room, there to view the gifts that had been placed artistically by trained hands. The wealth of the metropolis had contributed to that priceless collection. All the craft of gold and silver smithing had been drafted and the jewelers of every land had packed in velvet and satin the splendor of their art. Blazing magnificence and shimmering beauty.

From gift to gift the bride moved in ecstatic bewilderment, voicing and bowing her appreciation; the donors, each in his or her own way, beaming upon the recipient, into whose cheeks crept the light coral of embarrassment at the lavishment of the display. The rich man who had flung a diamond necklace into the collection took her genuflection as a matter of course. A former but luckless suitor who had sent a string of pearls flashed a glance of forgiveness and resignation at her acknowledgment. A squire of dames, slightly withered but still presentable, received for his bracelet of sapphires the soft touch of her hand upon his aged arm, and bowed like a satrap.

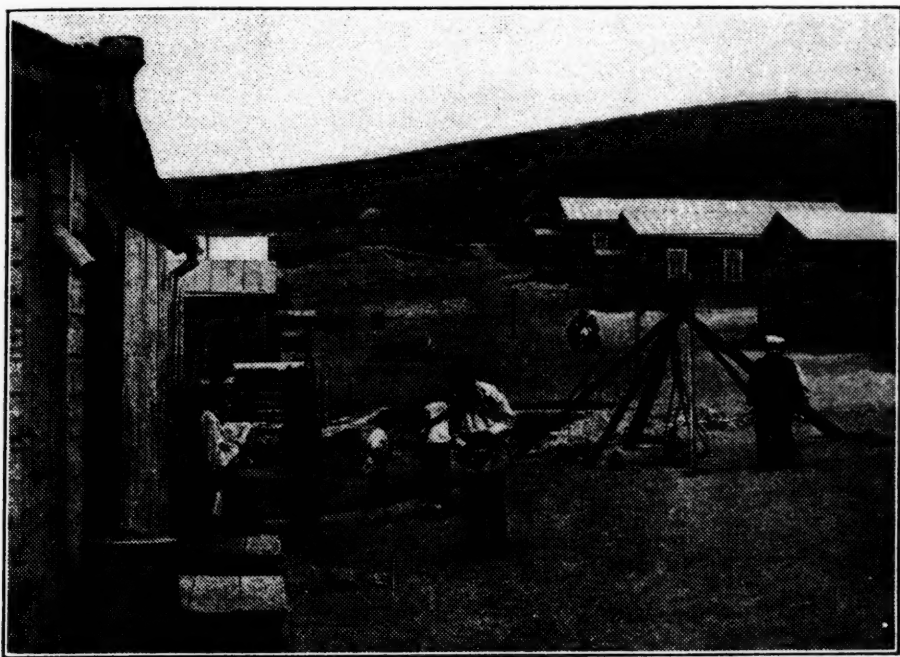
In due course she had examined every gift and thanked each giver; that

is, every gift but one that somehow up to the moment of its discovery had escaped her vigilance. It reposed modestly, as some gifts will, among the richer tokens. This particular gift was a silver card tray upon which lay a square piece of bristol, face down. She lifted the card and turned it over, revealing two words written in ink, two words penned laboriously. Swiftly, as sunlight breaking through foliage, she lifted her head and searched the faces about her. Never has it been my lot to see such an expression of expectancy and concern in a human countenance. The bridegroom, obviously disturbed, reached out his hand. She waved him aside and alone walked toward the drawing-room entrance, parting the guests as she moved. Straight as a homing pigeon flies, that bride, that beauty at whose feet every desirable bachelor had cast himself with all his worldly goods, ran like a child into the arms of the old family butler, and with a little sigh of ineffable happiness, kissed him tenderly upon his left temple. For a fleeting second his clumsy arms embraced her, though the next instant he assumed his professional posture; nor did he lift a hand to wipe away the tear that stole down his flaming cheek. Through the mist that hung in his eyes he saw the whole past—her childhood, her girlhood, her début. Now her exit from the homestead, a bride on the arm of a stranger.

An hour after the guests had departed she came downstairs dressed in a brown traveling suit *en route*, like Cinderella to the pumpkin coach drawn by the white mice champing at the curb. All the priceless wedding gifts had been left behind, but in her suede glove was tucked a small card upon which were written laboriously, as I said before, two words:

From Thomas.

And that was the one time in twenty years that he had brought his own name on his own card tray to his lady.



Burton Holmes Photo, from Galloway

A VILLAGE IN PROVINCIAL RUSSIA, WITH THE SNOW LACKING

# The World Today

*Exploring the Arctic in a passenger train—Russia's  
new harbor of Murmansk and its Lapps,  
its Chinese, and Soviet culture*

By Junius B. Wood



Murmansk, U. S. S. R.  
POLYNARNYI KRUG,  
which is Russian for "polar  
circle," is on lat. 66:32  
north, just where the arctic  
begins. That is why it is the  
name of a railroad station.

One place seems as good as another  
for stations in the windswept waste of

tundra and scrub pine. This is one  
where name and place were pre-  
destined. If not historical, it has  
geographical fame—in fact, world dis-  
tinction. There cannot be more than  
one other, possibly in Sweden, on the  
arctic circle with railroad service. Also  
each of its ten inhabitants can tell just  
where he lives in parlance of degrees

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and minutes.

More stations, an average of one for every nine miles—clusters of log houses half buried in snow, an occasional bundled family with a reindeer team which has come for supplies from the bleaker waste beyond—follow until Murmansk is reached, one hundred and forty-seven miles within the arctic circle and the world's northernmost spot reached by railroad. Murmansk is lat. 68:59, only one hundred and forty-four miles south of Point Barrow, Alaska, the farthest north of the United States.

#### THE DINING CAR

Instead of cold lunches of frozen meat the "hardy" polar explorer of these days on this route can ride in a *wagon lit* and eat in a dining car, and a very proper dining car at that. In the dining car of my northward bound train a passenger was whistling.

"Don't whistle," the conductor was admonishing the passenger when I slipped through the door with a blast of snow.

"If everybody whistled how would it sound?" the dour conductor continued. "People might not like it."

"Is there any Soviet law which prohibits whistling?" I inquired.

With the look which a self-respecting waiter bestows on a ten cent tip the conductor turned on his heel. The new Soviet culture makes everybody his neighbor's keeper. Some are so busy telling their neighbors what to do that they have no time to care for themselves.

The conductor sat down at his table and started an elaborate combing of his sleek black hair. Across the aisle a hairy man was drinking vodka and wiping his mouth on the back of a dirty wrist. A woman tossed a cigarette butt on the floor. The aprons of the flannel-shirted waiters once had been white, and the paper table covers were well splashed no matter how often they were changed, for the roadbed was

rough. Several things might not be liked, but the food was good and the charge was only thirty cents for a meal of three courses.

In 1916 the railroad was extended six hundred and fifty-two miles from Petrozavodsk to Murmansk. If it had not been for the war Soviet Russia would not have this railroad to its only ice-free port. Imperial Russia built it to get munitions, for the northern coast of the Scandinavian peninsula could not be blockaded, as could the Black Sea ports with the Turks sitting over the Dardanelles. Of course the imperial government built it too late.

In April, 1916, the population of Murmansk consisted of two men living in a beached schooner, two windows and a door cut in a side of the hull and a tin stovepipe shoved through the deck. The first train arrived in November, 1916, and in 1927 the population was eight thousand, seven hundred and seventy-seven. Civilization and new life have come to the Russians, Lapps, Ijenty, Samoyeds, Finns and others who inhabit the Kola peninsula, for the railroad has its purpose in peace as well as war.

#### THE SPEAKING PLACE

A new harbor is being built in Murmansk, for in a future Red war it may be useful as a base for naval operations. One official suggested that it be inspected, but the president of the district executive committee, very eager to show everything else, promptly refused that request. However, anybody who cares to face the biting winds can see the harbor. It is not much as harbor works go, mostly built of wood, but it is invaluable to an ice-bound country, as in the winter most of the cotton imported from the United States and the grain exported from the Soviet Union pass through here.

Just as every village in the United States has a bandstand, every settlement in the Soviet Union has its tribunal. Making speeches is an im-



portant part of Bolshevik culture. Philosophers say that the Russian was deprived of free speech for so many centuries that, after the revolution, his ears were starved.

Murmansk has a two-story, concrete tribunal, the only thing rising through the smooth snow-covered surface of the big public park east of the two-story building of the Gubispolkom—provisional executive committee. The tribunal is strung with colored incandescent lights and at night shines as an eternal beacon, until daylight shows that it is a shrine as well as spellbinders' rostrum.

Underneath is a new monument, also of concrete, with a bronze slab showing a five-pointed star and the legend: "To the victims of the intervention of 1918-20 in Murmansk. Workers and fishermen. Erected in the tenth year of the great October."

#### THE PRESENT LAYOUT

Between the hill and the railroad is the new city—a sprawling two-story log hotel, a coöperative store of concrete bricks, a public park with a ski slide, a post office, a prison stockade, scattered stores and straight streets of log houses. On the windswept peak a little house was buried to its roof while at its side half a dozen men were digging a pit in the ten feet of snow for the site of another—home building under difficulties.

"Museum open every day—free!" was the sign on the door of a little building. It was the only museum, art gallery, exhibit or other show which I

saw free in the Soviet Union. A quiet young man inside made visitors not only free but welcome. His eyes lit up as he explained the stuffed fish and seals, bones of whales, samples of grain which may be grown in the arctic and the inevitable charts of progress in schools, health, communist cells and other culture.

The Kola peninsula, of which Murmansk is the capital, is the Russian, or eastern end of Lapland which stretches across Norway, Sweden and Finland. According to Vassily C. Alymov, the well-informed local statistician, there are only thirty thousand Lapps in the world, of whom one thousand seven hundred and eight are in Soviet Russia, all in the Kola peninsula. The remainder are divided roughly: Norway, twenty thousand; Sweden, six thousand five hundred, and Finland, two thousand.

#### GEOGRAPHY AND CHINESE

The peninsula's forty-nine thousand six hundred and fourteen square miles of alternating snow and swamp has a population of twenty-three thousand, classified as: Russians, sixteen thousand eight hundred; Lapps, one thousand seven hundred; Finns, one thousand three hundred; Sirjan, seven hundred; Ijentzi, six hundred, and Samoyed, two hundred and thirty. Raising reindeer in the interior and fishing on the coast are the chief occupations beyond supplying local needs. The catch of five thousand Murmansk fishermen in 1927, mostly by trawlers, was twenty-eight thousand tons.

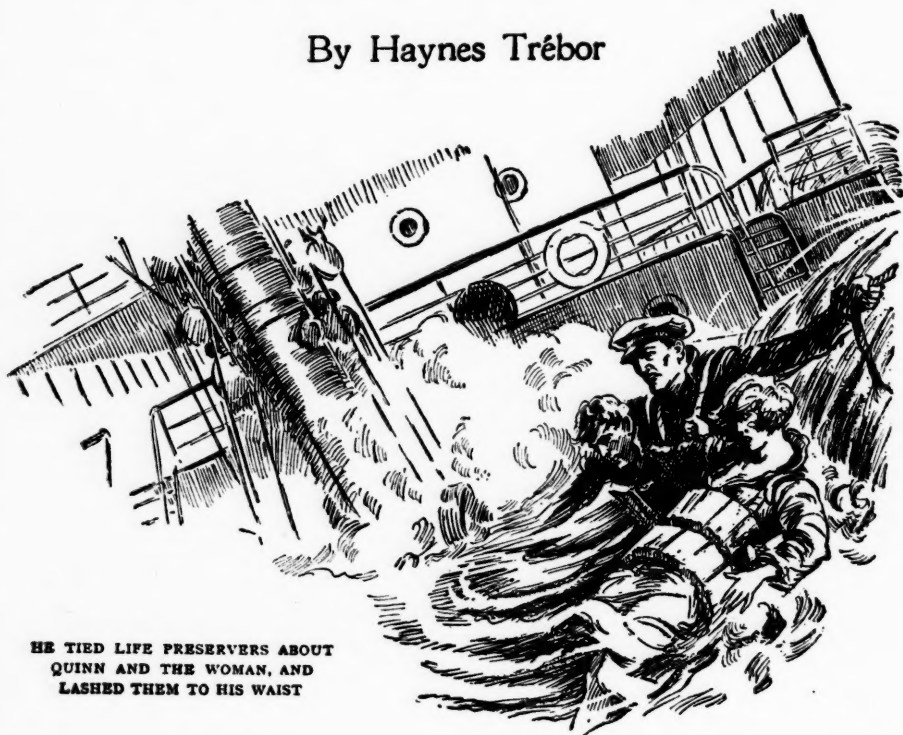
## COMING—

Timely, striking articles on the major sporting events

By GEORGE TREVOR

# The Hurricane

By Haynes Trébor



HE TIED LIFE PRESERVERS ABOUT  
QUINN AND THE WOMAN, AND  
LASHED THEM TO HIS WAIST

*While the furies of the Caribbean tempest racked Captain Quinn's steamer, it was a time of storm and stress in the lives of two men and one woman on board of the Weldon*



THE faces of the circle of men were stolid, immutable, graven shadows that were waiting for their desire to be satiated. They looked on impartially, making almost no comment; they were like cattle in a barn lot at dusk, knowing that if they waited long enough they would be fed. These men

knew that if they waited long enough they would see blood.

In the circle they formed on the forward deck well two men were fighting. Both were stripped to their waists, and coal dust and sweat and crimson gore were smeared over their hairy bodies. Taut muscles played back and forth under their tanned skin, driving fists that were as tightly clenched as piston

heads. The fists flashed with irregular rapidity, striking heavy blows at close range, mauling face and ribs and belly, hitting again blindly with the fury of savage beasts; and the circle of spectators stood watching, taking each vicious blow like a morsel of food flung to dogs who disdain to touch it, and who wait to lap the warm blood after the final slaughter.

On the bridge deck two figures in white-crowned officers' caps leaned on the rail. They were watching with disinterested gaze for what they apparently regarded as the inevitable. Presently Kline, the first officer, spoke.

"That Honduran is giving Stanton a tough battle," he remarked.

His companion nodded.

"Outweighs him by at least fifteen pounds; but he's weakening. In a minute Jim will land his knock-out blow."

"Of course!" Kline smiled reflectively. "God, what a reputation for a man to have—the best fighter on the Gulf of Mexico! And no science, no style, not even one skillfully timed blow; nothing but brute strength and endurance, and a passion for fighting. Jim Stanton comes the nearest to drinking blood of any man I know."

"Well, every man has one first love. If one's great passion is for fighting—"

"I wonder just how much of a devil he is with the women?"

Kline's companion laughed.

"May depend on the women," he said. "What a fighter!"

"It's too bad, too," Kline answered.

"A man like him might have pounded his way to some decent berth in the days when flint-fisted skippers were needed; but now—well, it doesn't get him anywhere. Makes it bad for the ship sometimes, too. Agents complain, port officials hear about it and want to know what's it all about. One bully gets a ship a bad name when half the crowd are college boys."

"Yes—he'll get just as far by going below and trying to stop the pistons

with his bare fists." The officer scratched his head with a gesture of having ceased to be concerned. "By gad, Jim is having a tough scrap! He's getting hot, too; look at the way he's licking his lips."

Kline leaned his chin on his wrists and gazed below with narrowed eyes.

"He'd better keep his tongue in his head. I wish this fight would end!" He laughed shortly. "Funny how a man will hang around a fight until it's all over, no matter how little he wants to. There's some beast in all of us, I guess. Wow, that was a blow—right on the point of the chin, too. Good Lord, this is going to end in murder!"

Stanton had reeled backward when the fist of the Honduran stoker crashed upward and landed with a terrific impact on his chin. His guard seemed to drop for an instant, and the onlookers gasped. Then Stanton's big frame straightened, and his eyes became like open furnace doors. From his mouth there came the savage growl of a wounded elephant, deep, throaty, and full of warning of the charge.

The Honduran, elated over his momentary advantage, had started to close in, but suddenly he shrank backward. His heel tripped, and the other man was upon him. Hard fists moved like the hammers of a riveting crew against the stoker's body; they struck with terrific force, bruising, ripping flesh, flinging blood into the faces of the encircling pack.

In a moment the Honduran went down. His head hit the deck, face downward, when his body was literally catapulted by a mighty blow that caught him just below one ear; and he lay still where he had fallen.

For awhile Stanton stood above his vanquished foe, swaying and breathing like a steam exhaust, while blood trickled from the corners of his lips. Then a seaman caught his falling body as it sagged, a dead weight, to the deck. The sailor looked at the unconscious champion and turned with startled eyes

to his mates.

"Gawd!" he cried. "If 'e ain't bit his tongue nearly in two! That upper-cut wuz what did it. Gawd, will ye look at 'im?"

Another seaman leaned over, and a dry smile spread on his face.

"Damned if he ain't! I reckon that's a bad mess fer a third mate to be in. Fine chance 'e'd have now of yellin' an order! Couldn't make 'imself heard if everybody stopped to listen."

## II

JIM STANTON was getting along in his later youth, a big-boned, thickly set fellow. His youthfulness showed most plainly in his face. One saw there frankness, a kind of simplicity, yet an earnestness and a rigid honesty that might have been sternness. Many things the man had not grasped, but one hesitated to call him a blundering idiot. Fighting was as strong wine to him, and he looked upon life as something that his fists must dominate.

His battle with the Honduran stoker brought about pitiful consequences. The end of his tongue was gone, and he experienced great difficulty in talking. It made him morose, for he seemed to think that he was being laughed at, or that his affliction was regarded as a sign of physical weakness. Eventually he quit trying to talk, except with his eyes. It became easy for the men to read his thoughts by the changing glare in his eyes, but nevertheless it was difficult work handling a third mate's berth on a tramp steamer. He took to scribbling notes when he wanted to say anything to the other officers; but it was awkward.

The Weldon steamed into the harbor under a blazing sun and dropped anchor in the roadstead. Mr. Kline, mopping his brow freely with a blue cotton handkerchief, and shedding first linen coat and finally his collar, kept up a continuous volley of swearing until he had the cargo to be put off

transferred to a lighter and the hatches battened down on the stuff they were taking aboard.

"It isn't natural for anything to get as hot as that sun is," he said to the boatswain. "It must be two hundred on that deck. Look there, I blistered my wrist just leaning on the rail. Working two dozen greasers cleaning out a hold would drive any man mad. Lord, I'm hot! I'll bet you a glass of whisky with a chunk of ice in it as big as my fist that if this heat keeps up, we'll see the glass tumbling."

It was no cooler after the sun had gone down. Smoke from the Weldon's funnel simmered slowly upward, and even the sea appeared to be radiating heat. Captain Quinn and the first and second mates were lying on deck chairs under the bridge deck awning, Stanton having the watch. It was utterly useless to attempt to keep cool. The three men, breathing heavily through drooping, half opened mouths, lay still in their chairs, lest the slightest muscular exertion add to their torment.

"How's the glass, Mr. Josephs?" the captain asked.

The second rolled his head over like a man with a burning fever.

"Steady the last time I noticed it, sir, about half an hour or so ago."

Silence fell again for a moment.

"It'll fall, all right," Mr. Kline muttered at last.

"I would like to get out of the Channel before we get into anything," the captain said.

Mr. Josephs lifted his head a few inches and peered shoreward.

"Hello!" he said. "Here comes the consul's launch. Wonder if he's taking a cruise to get cool, or if it's a social call!"

The small craft was headed for the steamer. It drew alongside, and Andrews, the consul, climbed aboard. He greeted the two officers with a listless wave of his fat, freckled hand, and turned to the captain.

"May I see you in your cabin for a



moment, Captain Quinn—or any place where it's not too damned hot?"

"I should think a man who lives here in the tropics would get used to the heat," remarked Kline with a faint grin.

"Not a white man. The longer you stay the worse it gets."

"We can talk in the chart room," Captain Quinn said, and conducted his visitor there.

Andrews brought a large handkerchief into play, and scrubbed his face and neck. Then he held the piece of linen between his two hands and fluttered it back and forth, to dry it. Dropping into the armchair the captain placed for him, he sucked his lips while he arranged his words. Then, with his head slightly to one side, and squinting one eye, he said:

"I'm going to ask you to do me a favor, captain."

The master's brows wrinkled, and he brought his eyes to look at his guest.

"Yes?" he queried.

Andrews cleared his throat and wiped his lips with the damp handkerchief.

"It's nothing but charity, you understand, captain. I'm not acting as an American official now. I know you chaps on the freighters don't like to be bothered with passengers, and I don't blame you; but"—the speaker paused to make sure that he remembered the words as he had rehearsed them to himself before coming—"but a man shouldn't mind doing a little act of charity now and then, should he?"

Captain Quinn nodded noncommittally. He would have preferred fewer words, but he remained patient. The visitor gathered a deep breath and went on:

"Well, captain, I want you to do—I want you to take a woman to New Orleans for me. That's your port of discharge, isn't it?"

Quinn's eyes narrowed, and he looked at Andrews more sharply. The other suddenly realized that the cap-

tain might be misunderstanding him. He flushed nervously and hurried to speak again; but the master had turned away.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Andrews," he said, "but I couldn't possibly take a woman passenger on board the Weldon."

"Why not, sir?"

"No accommodations, for one thing. I haven't a cabin steward, in the second place; and in the third place, I don't want a woman aboard."

"But wait a minute, captain!" Andrews mopped his face viciously and waved his hand in front of Quinn. "This is an act of charity. Besides, captain, this woman has got to get out of Puerto Juan to-night. She won't be any trouble, and I don't give a damn what you do with her after you get to New Orleans."

Quinn was staring into the darkness that was gathering beyond the steamer in sinister shadows. He shook his head.

"Afraid I can't help you, Mr. Andrews," he said.

He started to rise, but the consul laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Wait a minute, captain! Let me tell you this woman's story."

The captain smiled sarcastically.

"I'm afraid you're being too damned charitable, Mr. Andrews," he said dryly.

Andrews now was gesticulating excitedly.

"Captain, please don't misinterpret my words. Let me tell you the facts in the case. This woman—she's only about thirty—her name is Margaret Cullen, she says—started out in New Orleans. Seems she got into some sort of trouble. She's nothing but a girl. You know how a girl gets into trouble, Captain Quinn!"

"I know," Quinn answered quietly. Andrews felt that he detected a tone of bitterness in the speaker's voice and a faint sneer on his lips. "Go on!"

"Nothing—nothing really bad. Got mixed with the wrong crowd, got a

reputation, and then was caught in some police affair. There was a chap—wealthy, old family, had a shipping business—who wanted to marry her. Said he loved her and all that. Family objected, but he said he didn't care. The girl finally consented to marry him."

The consul paused and dried his face.

"Her husband had a partner in his business, I believe. Anyway, they had been married a couple of years or so when the partner's wife sued him for a divorce, and named this Margaret Cullen—she didn't mention any other names when she told me her story—as correspondent. He made some damaging accusations, and it created a terrific scandal. Well, I don't know just what did happen, but it seems that Margaret's husband believed the stories that were told about her, and let his family persuade him to leave her. He turned her adrift—literally put her out in the street. The result was that the woman came back to his house one night and shot him. Then she beat it, and went into hiding from the police. Finally she met one Felipe Garcia, a planter from the back country here, who was in Mobile at the time. He offered some shady marriage agreement, and she finally left with him and came down here. These Latins are often a little uncertain in their loves, and last week Garcia turned the woman out."

There was silence. Nothing on the ship moved, and not a voice stirred on the stifling atmosphere. The consul was struggling with his handkerchief, but the captain seemed to have forgotten the heat. He sat like an immobile image in his chair, gazing into the sea.

"I've been in the tropics eleven years," Andrews said in a toneless voice. "I've seen men sink terribly low here; to some, I reckon, hell would be almost clean. I hate to think what could happen to a woman who let go. This Margaret Cullen had been keep-

ing a stiff lip, and somehow had managed to muster enough spirit to fight it out. Maybe she always had a little hope; but she realized that it was close to the end when Garcia gave her the gate. She came into town here. I saw her, and picked up snatches of her story. I went to see her. She was broken. God, man, I wouldn't want to die if I didn't do something, knowing what would happen to that woman if she let go in Puerto Juan! Just as an act of charity I want to get her away from here. I don't care what she does in New Orleans, but I can't see her soul lost in the tropics. You'll take her, captain, as a favor to me? I'll pay her passage."

The moments passed, and the consul began to fear that the master of the Weldon had not heard him; but finally Quinn spoke.

"I'm sailing in the morning," he said stiffly. "If you'll bring your passenger aboard to-night, I'll do what I can—for charity."

Andrews rose and smiled with relief.

"Thank you, captain," he said. "I am very glad. Well, I'll get ashore, and—by the way, Captain Quinn, the wireless reported storm warnings for the Gulf and the Caribbean this afternoon. There's a nasty blow kicking up somewhere in the southeast, expected to reach hurricane intensity as it advances up the Yucatan Channel."

"I'm expecting bad weather," replied Quinn. "After this, we could scarcely miss it. My glass is still steady, however."

"The message advised vessels to proceed with caution. Are you going to try to make north, or hadn't you better lie in port somewhere down here until you see what's going to break?"

"I can't waste the time. I'd rather be outside, anyway. There's no good anchorage for bad weather within five hundred miles of here."

Andrews shrugged.

"No doubt you know what's best.

Well, I hope you don't get into a bad blow. Good night, captain. I'll send my launch back in an hour with—with your passenger."

### III

SHORTLY after dawn the Weldon steamed out to meet the sun, which, rising red and sullen from the horizon, gave unnecessary warning that its burning heat would be unabated during the coming day. The wind seemed to have been scared away, and only a stifling calm remained. The engine room crew worked stark naked, and about nine o'clock one of the firemen was carried away from the hold exhausted.

Captain Quinn paced the wooden grating on the bridge with his eyes nearly closed, feeling the dry skin on his face blistering; but his course had been set—northward.

The passenger was not seen during that first day out. She had come aboard about half past ten the evening before. The captain had removed his personal effects from his cabin, and on his orders Mr. Kline had taken the woman there. Mr. Kline had also told her that it was the captain's request that she should not appear on deck unless it was absolutely necessary.

Quinn wondered, as he paced the bridge, if it was likely that Margaret Cullen would suffocate in the cabin. The thought seemed to become distorted, like objects near a hot surface. Finally the captain decided that he had better not trouble his mind too much when the weather was so hot. Quarters had been arranged for him in the chart room, and he slept on the black leather couch there—slept as well as a man could have slept anywhere.

The officers had received instructions concerning the passenger. She was not to have the liberty of the ship, nor was she to enjoy the company of any man on board. Such things as were necessary for her ordinary comfort were to be provided by the proper

officer; and it was of her comfort that Captain Quinn found himself thinking as he watched his vessel forge ahead through the tranquil blue waters.

It was quite dark, in spite of the faint halo of stars that hung over the earth. The moon had not yet risen. Only two of the deck chairs were occupied, for Captain Quinn said that he was too restless to sit down. Stanton and Josephs were in the two chairs; Kline was on the bridge, watching the barometer, which, he swore, was going to drop a point before the night was half over. It was an hour before midnight.

Quinn and Josephs heard a low sniff from the third officer—the sort of indistinct noise that a dog makes when it is thrown on the alert by its instinctive perception of the near-by presence of a person, or of another animal. The captain turned curiously and found Stanton staring intently down the deck. A shadowy figure was standing behind one of the boats.

Stanton got up, but the captain's voice cut in sharply.

"I'll go, Mr. Stanton," Quinn said.

The other man hesitated, as if undecided whether to obey or to continue upon his quest; but he dropped back into the chair and passed his hand in front of his face in salute. That very motion suggested an antagonism which Quinn sensed immediately. As he walked away, he felt the glaring eyes of the man upon his back and heard a tense, animal-like snarl. He jumped nervously, imagining that those two magnificent fists were to be suddenly hurled at his head. He thought, too, that Josephs laughed, and it irked him. His temper strained to be loose.

The woman's back was to him when Quinn approached her, and she did not turn. In the gloom he could scarcely make out her features.

"Good evening," the captain began quietly.

She did not stir.

"I'm afraid it was uncomfortable in

your cabin. I'm sorry," he said bluntly.

"Thank you," she answered, without changing her position. "You are kind. Do you object if I stand here for a few moments?"

"Certainly not. I am only afraid that you would be annoyed by some of my men. It's a bit—h-m!—unusual, you know, having a woman on board."

"I wouldn't want to cause you trouble."

"A matter of discipline merely."

Her low laugh was scornful, and she turned her face to him, so that he could see that she meant the mockery for him.

"I like to hear you talk of discipline, Martin!" she said. She stopped laughing suddenly, and stared at him earnestly. "I don't quite understand why you happen to be the one to rescue me."

"Simply because I happened to be the master of the only American vessel in Puerto Juan. I did not know you were there."

"If you had known, would you have come?" the woman inquired; but he was silent. "Why did you take me aboard?"

"Andrews, the consul, asked me as a favor—for the sake of charity," he answered.

Margaret's voice was bitter and cold.

"You always did believe in charity, Martin!" she told him, not knowing how deeply her words hurt him.

He merely nodded.

"I intended to kill you," she went on after a moment. "Honest to God, I hoped I had killed you. It would have made things much simpler."

"Yes," Captain Quinn muttered. "Yes, it would have. I'm sorry."

"I hated you then—you and your charity!"

"And now?"

Margaret caught her breath, and even in the darkness the man saw that her teeth were pressed savagely into her lower lip.

"I've been sorry about that affair,

Margaret," the captain continued, when he received no reply. "When that story came out about you and—that fellow, I didn't understand."

"Your charity wasn't big enough to trust me after I'd given you my promise?" The woman's scorn was driven into his breast like a slender knife. "I'm still sorry I didn't kill you!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Who is the big fellow?" Margaret Cullen asked, motioning with her hand to the ponderous form of a man coming down the deck.

"That's one of my officers—Mr. Stanton," replied Quinn.

As the man passed them, the woman watched him from the corner of her eye. Stanton went by at a deliberate pace, glaring at them boldly, a leer on his full lips. He touched his cap and strode on.

Margaret smiled at the anger on the captain's face.

"He seems to want to be friendly," she said. "He's been past my cabin a dozen times to-day, and each time he stared in at me through the porthole with the most peculiar expression on his face, as if he wanted to say something. I could almost read in his eyes what he wanted to say, they were so eager and burning." The woman laughed a little. "I suppose he would make a devilish lover!" she added.

The captain scowled, and his teeth clicked angrily.

"Mr. Stanton has had orders not to go near your cabin," he said.

"Is that why he didn't speak to me? What wonderful discipline!"

"Stanton can't talk. His tongue was bitten off in a fight."

She turned to catch another glimpse of the figure disappearing aft.

"How unfortunate! If I'd known, I would have spoken to him. With all your fine discipline, I suppose you're careful not to say a civil word to the poor fellow, much less a kind one!"

He took the gibe quietly.



"You'll not have anything to do with Mr. Stanton, please," he told her. Margaret laughed.

"This Stanton is evidently a terrible fighter, isn't he?" she said. "Martin, you're afraid of him!"

Kline's voice came down from the bridge.

"I say," he shouted, "she's tumbled. More'n a point in the last hour!"

His voice died away as he went back to watch the glass.

"What did he mean?" the woman wanted to know. "Sounded as if it was something he had a bet on."

"The barometer is falling," Captain Quinn answered. "We are probably in for bad weather. A hurricane is reported making up."

Margaret watched him as he went up the companion to the bridge, and she remembered that three years ago his shoulders had not sagged so listlessly, nor had he such a forbidding air of grimness. She went into her cabin and stared thoughtfully at the bed which had been his.

Kline pointed at the needle that tells an inexorable story.

"She's started down, sir," he cried. "Look at her! Before long she's going to get dizzy falling so fast!"

The captain nodded.

"Yes, I'm afraid that hurricane reported in the lower Caribbean is going to overtake us before we get very much farther. It's going to be one hellish blow, too, Mr. Kline!"

"I agree with you, sir," the mate answered. "Do you think we'd better try to get into the Channel? We're apt to run right in to it."

"The course won't be changed," Quinn said.

"Certainly, sir," returned Mr. Kline politely.

The captain got down a chart and studied it. Perspiration rolled from his brow and fell on the paper. His face became suddenly haggard and tired-looking, his eyes were not concentrating on the figures of the chart

before him. His mind was back in New Orleans and in the years that were past.

He shook his head impatiently in an effort to collect his thoughts. For a few minutes he figured on a pad, and then he made a tiny dot on the map. Somewhere to the southeast he could have placed another dot—or, more exactly, a spiral. A few miles to the west of his dot ran a long line of coast.

#### IV

THE first sea to board the steamer came climbing over the starboard bow like a bloodthirsty pirate bent upon looting the Weldon. It brought up sharply against the bridge, and the ship quivered, her screw pounding furiously. The sea which had been running since early afternoon now had a seething, gustful, impassioned wind to help it. The gale, rushing madly on its way, foamed at the mouth and spat white spray against the glass of the portholes and cabin windows. Mr. Kline's hurricane had come!

The man in the heavy black oilskins kneeling beside the bed turned his head to listen to the broken sea racing along the deck outside. The woman's arms were still about his shoulders, his cheeks were feeling the tender warmth of her bosom. She was staring, wide-eyed, frightened, in front of her.

"I've got to go up on the bridge," Captain Quinn said. "I may not be able to come to you again. You aren't afraid?"

"No, Martin. No, I won't be afraid," she responded, but with trembling lips. "I'll—I'll pray a little, if I can, for you up there."

"There may be days of this weather," he went on. "It's going to take every man's strength on board to fight it; and there may be accidents, Margaret."

"No, no, dear! Please don't talk like that!" she cried.

"But I must. Margaret. I—I love you. I've been sorry a thousand times

for what happened back yonder. Can you—will you forgive me?"

The deck pitched, and after a moment righted.

"Of course," the woman answered, and drew his damp head to her, kissing his hair. "I've always forgiven you." She seemed to be reflecting. "Tell me," she went on, "what happened after—after I left."

"Scott took advantage of the opportunity for which he had been waiting. It was a nasty plot all along. The divorce was a hoax. Oh, that I should have believed it!"

"Never mind! Go on."

"Scott and his crowd were waiting like a flock of vultures. I was in the hospital for a long time, my affairs were in a dreadful muddle, and my family had more or less deserted me. When I was able to attend to business again, I discovered what Scott was after. He had ruined the firm and swindled me out of everything I had, except this steamer. She was the only thing I managed to save out of the whole fleet. Oh, Scott was clever! I knew practical navigation, and I took the Weldon out into the tramp freight business."

Her fingers had tightened about his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," she told him.

"I need you to help me now," said Quinn simply.

She smiled tremulously.

"You've always needed me, dear boy," she murmured.

He rose.

"Don't try to go on deck," he warned her. "If you want anything, blow into the tube there, and some one may hear you. I'll try to have the steward look in now and then."

Quickly he stooped, pressed a fierce kiss on the woman's lips, and was gone. She lay still for a long time, hot, scalding, joyous tears coursing over her flushed cheeks. The storm gathered fury with each thundering sea that smothered the vessel under tons of

water, but the hurricane was something far away from Margaret.

With two seamen clinging to the wheel, to keep it from whirling like a drunken top, Captain Quinn stood on his bridge and gave his orders, setting the course of his ship, fighting for a point, maneuvering with the wind and the sea for its life.

The men not on watch had been ordered to be ready to turn a hand if needed, and were sitting below in the saloon, smoking, waiting. It was going to be a long, gruelling battle. Every hour the steward came up to the bridge with hot coffee in a thermos bottle, and the men there swallowed some of the liquid. Mr. Kline came to relieve Mr. Josephs, and later Stanton came to take his place. Captain Quinn never left.

The men below in the engine room were moving perilously about, keeping watchful eyes on the hissing machinery. The Weldon could not relax for even an instant in its battle with the sea, that black devil, with his temper up; the engines must be kept turning. He was smashing all the forces at his command against the steamer every second, pounding relentlessly, only too anxious to take advantage of one slip of the sailors who were matching wits with him.

Unconsciously the men's faces took on a grimness, the quiet stubbornness that appears in a crisis. Whatever may have been their sins, whatever their weaknesses at other times, now these were true sons of the sea, answering the call of their duty. They were a part of the ship, of its steel sides, of its throbbing engines, of its collective life and purpose.

Shortly after daylight came, the Weldon's last boat was smashed to splinters and carried away. The decks were raked clean, and portholes had been battered in as if they were delicate spider webs. Two doors went, splitting before the onrush of water. Companionways were knee deep in

water, with seamen sloshing back and forth, and water swirling about the legs of the men on the bridge.

And so the day came and wore on with its weary hours. The Weldon was plowing into each onrushing sea, tired, battered, but refusing to yield. There was not time to nurse the men's bruises, nor to think of aching bodies.

Jim Stanton, the burly third, alone seemed to be enjoying the hurricane. On his face there was a vicious smile, and in his eyes a defiant flash. His great form moved about with tense eagerness, his hands were restless. The storm and the sea were challenging him—him, the best fighter on the Gulf of Mexico!

The challenge couldn't be ignored. It must be answered, blow for blow, muscle and nerve against water and wind, endurance against endurance. Stanton often laughed in a dry, throaty bass roar, flinging back his defiance.

Night came on, but it made little difference. The hurricane had been at its worst for long hours, and the passing of the scant daylight meant nothing. Nothing mattered—nothing except fighting on grimly, forcing weary muscles to toil on, keeping awake and holding the steamer in the face of the storm. After all, it was a simple task—that is, a simple task for men used to it.

Captain Quinn drank hot coffee every hour or so, up on the bridge. Kline and Josephs and the burly Stanton were sharing the watches with him, while threescore other men, lost somewhere in the hulk of steel, were going about tasks that were in their line of duty. No one failed, no one murmured, no one stopped to consider danger. If a man was swept overboard, if a man was thrown against a bulkhead and his bones pitifully crushed, some one followed to do what he had set out to do. The fight must be kept up to the end!

Mr. Kline came into the wheelhouse. He was calm, and no emotion that he may have felt was visible in his

face. Almost stolidly he spoke—screamed, rather, so that he could be heard.

"We've strained a plate, sir," he said. "Port side, for'ard cargo hold. I went down and had a look at it. Pretty bad, sir; we're shipping water fast, and the hole's likely to get bigger."

The sea had scored a point. Captain Quinn simply nodded. His blood-shot eyes held their gaze calmly on his first officer's face until Kline had finished speaking.

"Thank you, Mr. Kline," he said then.

He went into the room where he had lived since he brought the woman on board. Taking down a chart from a rack, he spread it on his desk. The paper was wet, and a corner of it tore off in his hands. He held it down with his spread fingers, while Mr. Kline gazed over his shoulder. With his little finger the captain indicated a spot on the map.

"We're somewhere off that two hundred miles of coast, between a hundred and fifty miles out," he shouted.

Mr. Kline noted that except for one short stretch, the chart showed rocks along the coast. He did not even let the thought come into his head what might be the odds against the Weldon striking that short stretch.

"All we can do is to try to run her ashore," Quinn was saying. "I don't know where we'll hit—most likely the rocks; but we'll have to chance it."

## V

THE inevitable had happened. It was what might have been expected. Quinn gave an order, and Stanton helped the two helmsmen swing the wheel over. The slant of the Weldon's deck changed instantly, and she was tossed still more violently by the seas that were tumbling on her battered decks.

Driven to cover in a last frantic effort, the steamer made for the un-

known shore. The waves, delighting in their triumph, ran behind, harassing, teasing with savage glee this thing that they had beaten.

Jim Stanton stood at the wheel now. As hours had passed, the relief had not come up, and the two men on duty were near exhaustion. Stanton swept them aside and took the wheel himself, planting his feet wide apart and locking his huge arms in the spokes. There was no need for relief to come; these last few hours wouldn't make any difference. There he stood, keeping the ship on its new course, which would soon send her hurtling upon waiting rocks or sand for the hurricane to finish its sport.

Suddenly the roar of surf came to their ears from the darkness. Another brief moment, and the Weldon pitched high, as if she had leaped from the crest of a giant comber into the very air. She careened and hurtled forward. There was a grinding, sickening jar that hurled every one to the decks; then a tearing and bumping, and the vessel listed to one side. The engines hushed their pulsating beat; eventually another day came creeping over the sea. It showed that the Weldon lay at the mercy of the waves, piled on a rocky reef half a mile from a low-lying shore.

The inevitable had happened; there was nothing more to do. Captain Quinn gave his last order, but it wasn't needed. The men knew already. They were to save themselves if they could.

Quinn slowly left the bridge, buffeted his way below, and went to his cabin. Pushing open the door, he stepped in, and found the frightened woman clinging to her berth. She was not hysterical, even in her fear, though the hours had passed maddeningly for her, shut in there alone, not knowing what might be happening. She only knew that the man she loved with all of her wounded soul was up there somewhere, fighting, doing all that he could. Somehow faith in that was enough.

Now he came to her, and she flew into his arms, pressing her warm lips to his face. Quietly he told her what had happened. There were no boats, and the steamer would probably begin to break up before long. All that they could do was to wait until the end came.

The door flew open, and a sea breaking on the deck rushed over the storm step and flooded the cabin. Stanton stepped inside and hurled the door shut by the weight of his massive body. He stood there facing the other two.

Captain Quinn understood; the woman understood. The expression on Stanton's face was plain enough. He did not need a tongue to speak; he had two enormous, aggressive fists.

First pushing Margaret behind him, the captain moved forward, and Stanton met him in the middle of the cabin. Fists swung simultaneously and found their marks against flesh. From a corner the woman looked on fearfully. Outside eager water was battering on the door, as if trying to join the fray.

Sloshing in the water, the two men grappled, clawing like beasts, hammering with bruised fists; but Jim Stanton was the best fighter on the Gulf of Mexico. Gradually he closed in on the captain, who had stood for thirty-six hours on the bridge, and Quinn went down, spinning like a log in a maelstrom. He struck the deck with a thud, and lay still.

In an instant the woman had dropped down beside him, lifting his head in her arms, whispering anxious solicitations, wiping the blood away from his face. A heavy hand caught her shoulder, and she felt Stanton's fingers digging into her flesh as she was being drawn upward. With a cry she jerked from the man's grasp, but the hand came back again. He leaned over her, his face distorted with the pitiful effort his mute lips were making to speak the words that were reflected in his gleaming, desiring, gloating eyes.

Finally the woman caught his knees and clung to them, her prostrate body



tossed about the deck with each lunge of the groaning ship on its deathbed. She was talking to him, the words flowing from her lips in their agonized appeal—pleading, arguing, promising, offering.

Stanton straightened up and stood, with his feet braced on the wet, slippery deck, glancing down at the figure at his feet. A change passed over his face, bewilderment crept into his eyes. The Weldon was going soon. Gigantic seas continued to break over her, and the hurricane was laughing in triumph, screaming defiance to the miserable fighters who had failed. Jim Stanton didn't hear the woman babbling at his knees.

His brow wrinkled, and he passed his hand before his eyes. The hurricane, howling unchallenged, sweeping everything to destruction—it had defeated the captain, had conquered him and tossed his wretched ship on the rocks. It raged on in its supreme power.

Stanton's hands clenched, and his mighty chest was heaving with his rapid breathing. The angry snarl that issued from his lips came from his aroused soul. The something that he had missed—he had suddenly grasped it now. It had come to him like the hurricane.

Jim Stanton was the best fighter on the Gulf of Mexico. No one had ever licked him. He couldn't be licked—he took unbelievable pride in that.

That morning he fought the biggest fight of his life, the bitterest. First he fought himself—struggled with himself not to make that woman keep her promise—her promise to give herself to him if he would try to save the man who lay on the deck. The second fight would be with the hurricane—with the sea. He never lost a fight, Jim Stanton!

He tied life preservers about Quinn and the woman, and then lashed them to his waist with short lines. Then he revived the captain, pouring rum down his throat. The woman told Quinn what they were going to do. He said that it was madness; but he knew that to speak of madness was merely to shout hollow words at the wind. It would be just as well to drown in trying to swim ashore as to wait until the stricken Weldon made their watery graves for them.

The three stood on the rail of the vessel, and when a wave broke over her they went with it. Stanton's arms lashing out to fight the sea was the last that Quinn remembered.

There were two survivors—two *known* survivors—of the Weldon. The woman and the captain, unconscious, nearly drowned, battered by the waves, were found on the beach when the hurricane lessened its fury. The short end of a manila rope was still about their bodies.

No one ever found Jim Stanton.

## GILBERT GABRIEL,

Foremost dramatic critic by verdict of New York's playgoers, producers, and players, is writing an article on the stage for the

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# Chester

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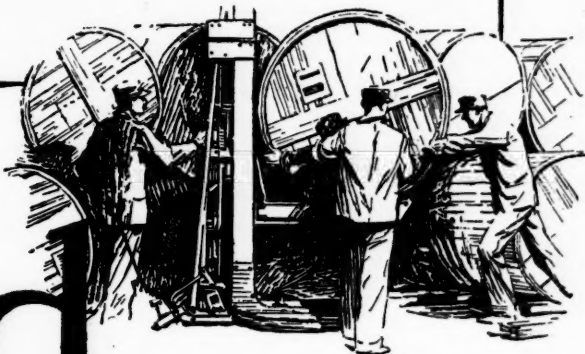
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Millions of pounds of choice tobacco from each crop are stored away in great warehouses to "age."

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# Wild Oats

*The Chaplain  
could not entirely ap-  
prove of the diversions that  
our soldier boys found on the  
sidewalks of Paris in wartime*



By James W. Earp



It was a summer evening in Paris, with a full moon overhead and a light-hearted throng strolling along the Champs Élysées. Music from the Petit Jardin across the way mingled with the hum of roller skates and the occasional shriek of a grisette.

It was the Petit Jardin that annoyed the chaplain who sat at a table on the sidewalk outside a little café—not the music, but the couples who emerged from time to time through the little door and disappeared up the darkened street on the other side. Always the male was a Yank, his perky overseas cap askew on his head, his broad shoulders swinging. Always the female had been a grisette.

The chaplain sighed. Another couple came from the portals of the Petit Jardin, and disappeared as had the others. His nice straight nose wrinkled in a frown, and he beckoned a waiter to re-

fill his empty glass. Only the fact that here was the best beer in Paris kept him chained to his seat. A couple of glasses of good beer helped him to think of a sermon for the morrow.

"*Mauvais*," muttered the chaplain. "*Très mauvais!*"

He forgot that he spoke in French, a habit that was growing upon him. Not until the waiter's voice was heard, carrying with it sorrow and reproach, was the chaplain reminded of his comment.

"It is to regret," said the *garçon*, in French. "I am desolate!"

If *monsieur le chapelain's* beer was not good, he explained, *monsieur le chapelain* need not drink it. Gladly would he, Émile, fetch more. *Monsieur le chapelain* must be pleased at all costs.

"Your pardon," said the chaplain. "The beer is very good. My thoughts were wandering."

He gestured wearily. Another



couple had taken seats at a table close by. The chaplain's frown spoke more than words. The waiter shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?" he demanded of the chaplain. "They are young. Once you and I were young, *mon chapelain*; but no more. We grow old fast; and when we are old we are apt to forget. Is it not so?"

The chaplain did not reply. He was frowning at a passing girl who had dared to cast a smile in his direction, notwithstanding the insignia on his shoulders and cap. She would not have done that to a cleric of her own race.

The shrill laughter of the grisette at the near-by table brought a shudder to the chaplain. What terrible voices these girls had! He shuddered again, and lighted a cigar. That left him only three. He must get a fresh supply in the morning, he reflected. Good cigars the commissary department doled out—none better.

He took a sip of his beer and settled back in his chair. Voices came to him from afar. A moment later four *poilus* on leave swung down the avenue, their arms linked while they sang the song they loved so well. They sang in French, but the chaplain understood. It was a catchy song—"Madelon." No wonder the *poilus* marched so well.

Madelon, you are the only one!

Madelon, for you we carry on!

"Give us from those sweet lips," we cry,  
"A kiss before we march to die!"

Madelon, she takes it all in fun;  
She smiles and says, "It simply can't be done!"

And then she gives the kiss, and doesn't mind—

"It's for the sweetheart that you left behind!"

The chaplain hummed as he kept time with his feet. He loved that song. Such a delicious irony it had! Only a Frenchman could appreciate its delicate humor—a shade suggestive, yet real humor.

He watched them till they rounded a corner and were lost to sight. It was odd to note that not one single grisette gave them more than a passing smile—a smile full of pride, or perhaps wistfulness; nor did any one beckon to them. The reason was plain. A simple *poilu* was not likely to have forty francs to spend on roller skating.

"How long you been in this burg, sarge?"

The chaplain craned his neck to look as he heard his own tongue spoken. Two Yanks had taken the table behind him. The speaker was a fair-haired, blue-eyed youngster with a corporal's chevrons on his sleeve; the other was a sergeant. The sergeant's face was turned away from the chaplain, but he could make out a lean jaw and a straight brown neck.

"About two months, kid, and I guess I'll stay awhile. The major likes me. How long you been here?"

"Since this morning. I'm from Bordeaux—engineers. Mighty lonesome down there, sarge. No girls except fat, dumpy, homely ones—mostly peasants, you know, and all built like the rear end of an army truck. No shapes except like bean bags tied in the middle. Good for heavy work like plow pulling or hay pitching, but not much to make love to."

"So you came to Paris?"

The corporal nodded.

"Yeh, I got so tired being lonesome that when I hit the gang for their bank rolls with the old galloping dominoes, I said to myself, 'Here's where I see Paris and some real girls!'"

"You've come to the right place," said the sergeant. "A. W. O. L.?"

"Not me!" boasted the corporal from Bordeaux. "I got me a pass. Say, tell that frog to shake a leg. I'm thirsty. No fun to drink when you're lonesome, and I been off the stuff all day. Sure is hell to be lonesome, sarge!" he concluded plaintively.

"Yeh, I know," agreed the sergeant. He snapped his fingers at the passing

waiter. "*Dépêchez-vous, garçon!*"

"*Oui, monsieur, tout de suite.*"

"*Deux cognacs,*" went on the sergeant.

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"You sure sling a mean frog, sarge," voiced the corporal admiringly. "Me, I can't even order grub in their language. Wish I could! Maybe I could get next to some of these dames."

"Lots of pretty girls here," nodded the sergeant as the waiter served them.

"That's why I picked you out," said the corporal eagerly. "When I heard you chowing with that taxi driver, I knew you were all right; and I thought if you'd be willing to show me around, why, I'd be glad to foot the bills."

"Sure!" agreed the sergeant. "Where'd you been?"

"Over to the skating rink there." The corporal gestured toward the Petit Jardin across the way. "Thought maybe I could find a girl loose over there."

"Wasn't there?"

"Yeh! That was what was funny. Lots of them, but I couldn't seem to have no luck."

"Why not?"

The corporal gestured helplessly.

"Because I couldn't skate."

The sergeant set his glass down and eyed the corporal through half closed lids. Twice he scratched his chin, as if in search of words; then he gave up and signaled the waiter for more cognac.

"With a bank roll, corp," said the sergeant slowly and with emphasis, "you don't have to skate."

"Maybe not," admitted the corporal with solemn mien; "but anyway, I didn't have no luck."

"Your luck's due to change," opined the sergeant, downing his drink in one gulp. "What do you say we have some beer for a change?"

"Anything, sarge. It's on me. How do you say 'beer' in French?"

"Just say 'bee-air,' like that. Try it. Call the waiter '*garçon.*' Don't

forget. Fine! You'll be a good frog yet."

"As I was saying," went on the corporal, when the beer was served, "I wanted to see some good-looking women. That's why I'm here."

"They're here, kid," replied the sergeant. "Nothing else in Paris. Keep your eye peeled on the street there, and the first time you see a pair that looks good to you, whistle, and I'll have them come a running."

"Thanks, sarge. Have another cognac?"

"Don't care if I do. *Garçon, encore deux cognacs.*"

"*Oui, monsieur!*"

Silence while they drank. A moment later the corporal from Bordeaux whistled as two grisettes chanced to stroll within view. The chaplain squared his chair about as the sergeant's "*bon soir*" echoed, and the women replied in kind. He saw them drop into chairs and order wine, sipping it slowly, enjoying its flavor to the last drop, as only a Latin can.

They were not young, nor could they be called beautiful by any stretch of the imagination. Under the dim lights of the café their eyes were cold and hard, and the skin on their faces and necks was leathery-looking and wrinkled; but the corporal from Bordeaux seemed to be satisfied. The conversation had little to distinguish it from a thousand and one other conversations that the chaplain had heard before. Being a rank outsider where French was concerned, the corporal had to depend wholly on the literal translations as offered by the sergeant.

"*Une promenade?*" suggested one of the women, when her wine was gone. "*Oui?*"

"Sure!" broke in the corporal. He did not need any translation there. "Ask her if she wants to skate."

She did not, but she would promenade. The corporal got to his feet.

"Let's go," he said.

They went. The chaplain bowed his

head over his beer as they moved away. Not so with the waiter, who pocketed a five-franc tip.

"Ah, youth!" he rhapsodied. "Would that I were young again, and here—in Paris. Is it not so, *mon chapelain?*"

The chaplain barely inclined his head. His eyes were on the two couples who had just left. They were entering the Petit Jardin after all.

"Thoughtless youth!" he mourned. "Reckless youth!"

A taxicab droned by on chain-driven wheels. The chauffeur sat stiffly erect, his high white hat almost touching the roof of his vehicle, ancient and decrepit though it was. Two hobnailed shoes protruding through the windows on each side proclaimed to the world that two Yank doughboys were seeing Paris by taxicab.

A bottle landed on the pavement, to skid unbroken to the very edge of the curb. As it struck, the waiter heard the tinkling sound, and hurriedly left two customers to retrieve the precious booty discarded so nonchalantly by the occupants of the chain-driven antique. Never until the Americans came to Paris were bottles to be had like this for the picking.

The chaplain shrugged his shoulders. After all, who could blame the waiter? Not he. From his blouse he fished out one of his three cigars, and lighted it.

At that moment the waiter returned. The chaplain never forgot the hungry, almost cannibalistic look on the man's face as he watched the lighting of that cigar. Without a thought of the morrow, the chaplain passed over one of his precious smokes. The look of amazement, of joy, repaid him many times over. He waved aside the waiter's thanks and fell into meditation, from which he was awakened by the sound of voices.

"Gosh, sarge, wasn't they awful?"

The chaplain recognized the voice of the corporal from Bordeaux. He half turned to look. The sergeant was fac-

ing him now, and on the soldier's breast was pinned a *croix de guerre* with palms. His eyes were steely gray, but with a good-natured twinkle in their corners.

"You picked them, kid, not me," the sergeant was reminding the corporal, as he ordered drinks.

"Sure, sarge; but how was I to know they was such hard-boiled babies? Bet mine was old when Napoleon went over the Alps, and yours will never see thirty again. What did you order—*cognac?*"

"Course! The only drink. Why?"

"Ah, nothing. You can have mine. I'll take beer. Not so much kick to it."

The sergeant lifted his glass and bowed.

"Here's to the girls of Paris. May they never grow less!"

"Drink!" mumbled the corporal. "Let's hope the next two don't have mustaches. Wonder why that is! The girls back home don't."

"Because they don't happen to be the girls back home," returned the sergeant, his eyes dreamy.

"Well, thank goodness, my girl hasn't got one!"

"Nor mine," said the sergeant. "*Garçon!*" he called. "*Deux cognacs!*"

"Leave me out," begged the corporal. "I still got the beer. Say, look at those two!"

He whistled. Obediently the sergeant hailed a passing couple designated by the corporal. The chaplain smiled as the girls vouchsafed a mere backward glance and hurried on. Working girls, without a doubt—good girls, as the chaplain knew with the first glance. Still—

"Let's go," urged the corporal.

"What for?" asked the sergeant. "There'll be others along just as good."

"I know, but that little one reminds me of some one I know. Come on!"

A shower of coins on the table, and they were gone, the sergeant protest-

ing as he followed the younger soldier. The waiter returned just as his two customers shot down the street in pursuit of the two girls. A deprecating shrug of his shoulders, a gathering of the coins, and he forgot the incident.

## II

MOODILY the chaplain sipped his beer and puffed at his cigar. War was all wrong, especially when it took a boy like the corporal and threw him into the maelstrom of hell. He was too young to be away from home influences, his mother, his childhood sweetheart.

The chaplain wrinkled his nice straight nose as he watched the spiral rings of smoke sail upward in the night air and lose themselves against the blank walls beyond. Sorrowfully he contemplated a dilapidated victoria that rattled by with a cargo of sight-seers, noting the cigarettes, the promiscuous love-making, the close proximity of bodies.

"*C'est la guerre*," sighed the chaplain. "Why not? Everybody blames the war. How the devil must laugh!"

The victoria groaned by. Then out of the darkness came two familiar figures, to take their old table behind him.

"*Cognac*," ordered the sergeant.

"Water," said the corporal dubiously. "Tell him, sarge. I'm thirsty."

The sergeant obeyed. The waiter lifted horrified eyes and gestured wildly. Had he heard aright? Perhaps the corporal would like some wine? Oh, yes, of a surety there was water; but to drink it! Once more the waiter rolled his eyes in horror; but he did not protest further. What mattered it to him if the corporal wished to commit suicide?

"And they were such nice-looking kids, too," the corporal was saying.

"Yeah," agreed the sergeant, without enthusiasm.

"What was it they said when you asked them to come for a walk?"

"They said they did not walk with

American soldiers, corp. There was some more hot air about having sweeties of their own, but I passed that over. Say, what did the little one hit you for?"

"I don't know, sarge; but she sure pasted me a good one in the right eye. Does it show?"

"Naw," said the sergeant after a brief scrutiny. "It don't. Never knew one of them to do that before, though."

"Aw, it don't matter. That's just my luck with these frog dames. For two cents I'd go back to Bordeaux in the morning."

"What for?" objected the sergeant, eying his brandy happily. "You ain't seen Paris yet." He lifted his glass and looked at the corporal. "Here's better luck next time!"

"Drink," said the gloomy corporal; "but I ain't sure there's going to be a next time. When you get slapped for passing a compliment to a lady, it's time to quit."

"Compliment?" The sergeant set down his glass and stared. "What kind of a compliment did you pass?"

"A French one, sarge. You said *doux* was 'sweet' and *petit* was 'little' and *poulet* was 'chicken,' so I called her a *doux petit poulet*."

"Holy cats!" exclaimed the sergeant. "No wonder she biffed you!" He called to the waiter and ordered two *cognacs* to regain his composure. "Corp, you're lucky she didn't call the gendarmes. Never call a French female a chicken. It's the deadliest of insults. Here"—he pushed over one of the little glasses of brandy—"drink this and cheer up."

"Naw, I'll take another glass of water. I'm off the hard stuff for to-night."

Two grisettes strolled by and cast languishing glances over their shoulders at the two Yanks. The corporal's blue eyes brightened as he nudged the sergeant and whistled. True to his duty, the sergeant hailed them, and



pointed to the two seats at the table. Would the ladies join them in a drink? The grisettes declared their intentions by joining them at once.

The sergeant turned to the corporal: "Well, kid, how do they suit you?"

One look, and the corporal shook his fair head.

"They don't," he said. "They're worse than the first two we had."

"Then it's no use wasting good booze on them," said the thrifty sergeant. "*Allez*, you two!"

He waved the two women away. They obeyed, after a volley of vituperative French that made the chaplain place fingers to his ears.

"Nice girls!" grunted the sergeant with a sarcastic grin. "Oh, well, you gamble when you pick 'em off the sidewalk. We'll try again."

"Naw, never mind, sargé," sighed the corporal from Bordeaux. "I'm sick of Paris." He glanced at the moon riding high above him. "Wish I was back home with my girl to-night! Don't you, sarge?"

"What's the use of wishing?" demanded the practical sergeant. "We're not."

"You got a girl back home, sarge?"

"Sure! Nice girl, too."

"So's mine." The corporal's blue eyes grew wistful. "We're going to be married when I get back—if I get back."

"Me, too," replied the sergeant.

"How about another *cognac*?"

"Order for yourself, sarge. I'll pay."

The sergeant ordered. There followed a silence that was not broken until the two girls who had repulsed the soldiers' advances a short time ago came strolling back down the street.

"Sarge," choked the corporal, "there's those two girls again!"

"Sure is," agreed the sergeant.

"You suppose—suppose you could call them over—"

"What for? Want to get slapped again?"

"Naw! I was just thinking perhaps you might tell the little one I'm sorry I insulted her."

"Better let well enough alone," advised the sergeant. "This time she might do worse."

"Maybe so, sarge." The corporal sighed. Then he gasped: "They're stopping, sarge!"

The corporal was right—the girls were stopping. Nay, they had stopped as he spoke. Low as their voices were, the chaplain heard.

"If I dared try them," the little one was saying timidly, "I would ask them about the letter."

"As you wish," replied the tall one indifferently. "They will only want to walk with us. I know these Americans. They're all the same, Madelon."

"Not my Jean," protested the one called Madelon. "You know my Jean is different. Anyway, the big sergeant speaks French."

"As you wish." Yvonne shrugged her shoulders resignedly. "You know what Pierre said—"

"Pierre lied!" broke in Madelon angrily. "Always Pierre has lied to me. Why would Jean send it, if it were not for me to come to him?"

"What're they saying?" asked the corporal, grasping his companion by the sleeve. "Are they mad at us?"

"Search me," replied the sergeant. "I can't hear. Still want to apologize?"

"If you'll tell them."

"Oh, well!"

In a voice that was meant to be placating the sergeant conveyed the corporal's apologies. The two girls looked askance at each other at this unexpected humility. As if by mutual consent, they approached the table. It was the sergeant who offered them seats, which they accepted.

"Wine?" asked the sergeant.

"*Non, merci—café*," said Madelon.

"*Et moi*," added the other.

"Make it three," nodded the corporal. "What did they order, sarge?"

"Coffee," chuckled the sergeant.

"Aw, well!" The corporal grinned. "Did you tell her I was sorry?"

"Sure! She said that was all right."

The corporal looked at Madelon, as if he expected her to confirm this statement of the sergeant's. The girl smiled, and the corporal sighed.

"Cute, ain't she, sarge?"

"Yeah!"

"Kind o' makes me think of my girl back home. What's she saying now?"

"She wants to know if I'll read a letter for her."

The chaplain caught that much. Madelon had a letter from her friend, an American soldier. He was in the hospital at St. Nazaire. Some of it she could make out, but not all of it. She had taken it to Pierre to read, even though she knew that Pierre would lie to her. Pierre was old, but he wanted to marry her, despite the fact that she had no dowry.

Her voice was soft and well modulated. By closing his eyes the chaplain could almost imagine himself back home among his own kind. For the first time he took a good look at the girl's face. Even under the garish lights of the café he could see that she was pretty. A moment later he was willing to concede her a beauty that was spiritual rather than physical. Perhaps it was in her gray-blue eyes with their wistful pathos, for her face was wan and pinched, and bore the signs of overwork and undernourishment.

"And you don't want to marry Pierre?" the sergeant was saying.

Her head toss was most emphatic. She did not. She did not love Pierre. She could never love Pierre.

"You love *him*?" asked the sergeant, tapping the letter in his hand.

She lowered her eyes, and the sergeant did not press the question. He cleared his throat awkwardly and began to read.

His translation was crude, but to the point. The writer was in the hospital at St. Nazaire. Soon he would be on his way back to his beloved America.

Would she come to St. Nazaire and marry him and go home with him? He loved her. She had said that she loved him. Did she love him enough to take the risk?

"I'm trying to get some money to send to you, sweetheart," the letter went on. "Don't know whether I'll have any luck or not. We haven't been paid for ages, but I'll do the best I can. I don't want to sail without you, Madelon, dear. I can't. I'd rather stay here and die than go back home without you."

It was a story as old as the hills, yet always new. Twice the chaplain blinked his eyes and wrinkled his straight nose as the longing, the yearning, the tenderness of that epistle unfolded. Madelon sat with shining eyes as the sergeant interpreted, her lips parted, her tiny hands clasped close to her small breast, her wan face alight with joy.

I'll see what I can do about the money, dear; but whatever happens, please come. I miss you so much and love you so much more! I want you, Madelon, for my wife. You will come, won't you, dear, to your sweetheart,  
JOHN.

"And did he send the money?" broke in the corporal.

"I don't know," replied the sergeant. "Hey, *garçon*, *encore deux cognacs*!"

"What's that 'P. S.' at the bottom?" persisted the corporal, leaning over to read for himself. "What's it say?"

"Nothing except that he's sending her a picture of his home town—the place where they'll live if she loves him enough to marry him."

"And nothing about the money?"

"Not a word. Guess the poor devil couldn't make the raise. I'll ask her."

"Ah, *oui, oui*," Madelon cried; "but Pierre said—"

"It was no good," finished Yvonne.

"Pierre lied!" came vehemently from Madelon. "I know he lied! Always Pierre lies; for why should my

Jean send me money that was not good?"

As she spoke, she fumbled in the bosom of her dress, and then the chaplain saw her lay something on the table before the two men. What it was he could not tell—possibly a banker's check or a money order.

The corporal was the first to speak. His exclamation was as short as it was sharp.

"No wonder Pierre said it was no good! Poor kid!"

"But it is good, is it not, *monsieur*?"

Madelon appealed to the corporal. The sergeant was looking across the way toward the Petit Jardin. For the space of a split second the corporal hesitated; but, when he spoke, his voice was assurance itself.

"Sure it's good," he said heartily. "I've seen them lots of times."

The sergeant's head jerked back to face the corporal.

"Eh?" he grunted.

"Nothing," replied the corporal. "I was just wondering how much a pound of English money was worth in our money."

The sergeant scratched his lean brown jaw with nervous fingers.

"About four seventy-five, corp; but you—"

"Wait till I figure it out," said the corporal, pencil in hand. "H-m—two pounds would be about a hundred and seventy francs, as near as I can figure. Tell her I'll cash it for her."

The sergeant obeyed. The eyes of the girl grew luminous with unshed tears.

"You are very kind, *monsieur*," she said, a tiny catch in her voice. "If it had not been good, I could not have gone to him; and—and I love him so much!"

She gathered up the French notes and held them tightly against her breasts, as if fearing to lose them. Her wan face at that moment was the face of an angel who had caught a glimpse of a newer heaven.

"I'm sorry I slapped you," she said to the corporal; "but I did not understand then that you might be so kind to Madelon. For that—"

She leaned across the table. Before the corporal could guess her intentions, her lips had brushed his cheek.

"For your girl," she said. "From Madelon!"

### III

LONG after Madelon and her chum had vanished the corporal sat, dreamy-eyed, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. The sergeant was also very quiet, sipping his *cognac* one after another in wondering meditation. It was the corporal who broke the silence.

"Darned nice kid," he mused. "Glad I could help her."

The sergeant acquiesced with an indifferent nod.

"Makes me think of my girl," sighed the corporal. "Wish I was back home to marry her now!"

A pause, while the sergeant ordered another *cognac*.

"Funny, ain't it?" resumed the corporal. "No matter how many girls you meet or like, there's only one that really counts. Anyway, that's how I feel about it. I get as lonesome as hell, but if I had Elsie nothing would matter. Did I ever show you her picture, sarge?"

"No, son."

"I got it here—see? Ain't she the queen?"

"Sure." The sergeant's voice betrayed a quiet lack of enthusiasm. "She's all there." He stirred, and held something across the table. "I got my girl here, too. What do you think of her?"

The corporal feigned surprise.

"Say, sarge, she's nice! Going to marry her?"

"Yeah, if I ever get back."

Silence. The music from the Petit Jardin had ceased. The hum of roller skates was no more. Little crowds were gathering about the door.

"I think"—it was the corporal's voice—"I think I'll go back to Bordeaux in the morning."

"You ain't seen Paris yet, kid," protested the sergeant weakly.

"I've seen enough, sarge. It's all right, but I can't enjoy it when I think of Elsie. Somehow nothing matters except her."

The sergeant rose reluctantly to his feet.

"I'll go as far as the Concorde with you," he volunteered. "Sorry you're leaving. Lots of things to see in Paris, kid!"

A bank note and some coins on the table. The waiter's smile and good wishes followed them as far as the corner.

"Youth!" mourned the waiter. "Ah, *mon chapelain*, it is great to be young!"

The chaplain stirred himself. His beer had gone stale, and his cigar was soggy and would not light. Oh, well, it was bedtime. The night air had grown chilly as he sat there. Odd that he had not noticed it! He must be growing old.

A chain-driven taxi rattled past—empty. He recognized it by the chauffeur's high white hat. It was swallowed up in the noisy crowd that poured from the portals of the Petit Jardin. It stopped, filled itself to overflowing, and went on.

Madelon, you are the only one!

Madelon, for you we carry on!

"Give us from those sweet lips," we cry,

"A kiss before we march to die!"

The *poilus* again, but not abreast as before. On each arm hung a girl, and all of them smilingly saluted the chaplain as they passed.

"Youth," muttered the chaplain. "Romance, adventure, love—I wonder!"

He got to his feet and felt for his purse. The waiter looked at him in mingled pain and sorrow, and with a deprecating hand waved away the note. Did his good friend think to give pres-

ents and not receive them? It was unthinkable. Jacques Leconte could not think of permitting it. Another day, perhaps, but not to-night—*non!*

There was more, but the chaplain could not follow the waiter's rattling French; nor did he attempt to argue. He knew the French mind too well for that.

"Oh, well!" he sighed. "So be it!"

His eyes strayed to the table so lately occupied by the sergeant and the corporal from Bordeaux, not to mention their acquaintances. A paper lay upon the table—a folded paper of many colors. The chaplain shook his head as he reached for it.

"Ah, these youngsters—so forgetful, so careless!"

Carefully he smoothed the crumpled folds of the highly colored paper. One look at what he held in his hands, and his eyes dimmed.

"English money?" breathed the chaplain. "Of all things! Deuce take it, the lad was crazy!"

But something told the chaplain otherwise. No Yank could have mistaken the certificate which gave to the lucky finder of it a two-pound package of rolled oats from the New England Milling Company, makers of English oats. The flaring prominence of the figure in each corner said pounds, but it followed with the word "oats" in large letters.

"Ah!" sniffed the chaplain.

He had found the key to the mystery at last. The inset lithograph on the certificate told him what it was. That bird's-eye view of the factory and the little town beyond showed the future home of Madelon and her lover, if all went well. What the chaplain held in his hand was the picture the boy had sent.

"Wild oats!" he murmured. "God bless the lad!"

Humbly, almost reverently, he tucked the gaudy certificate into the pocket of his blouse and set off up the street.





# Let's Talk It Over!

*A public conference in which the editor humbly repeats what the readers say.  
All are respectfully invited to hurl a brickbat or toss a bouquet*



HE late Elbert Hubbard wore his hair long. He never smoked and he never touched liquor. Some folks adjudged him eccentric.

But "Fra Elbertus," as he called himself, was a shrewd business man, and one of the most forceful writers of his time. Among his many literary and business activities, Hubbard published a little magazine, *The Philistine*, in which he never failed to print the knocks at himself—and there were many—that he received from friends and enemies.

By that means he not only won the confidence of readers, but received many valuable ideas. People realized that he was just as frank in publishing disparaging letters about himself as he was with complimentary ones. And so they wrote him what they actually thought.

Now, that has been the aim of MUNSEY'S "Let's Talk It Over!" department ever since it was started. We encourage readers to tell us exactly what they think, and that is what they do. For instance:

New York City.

I notice you welcome constructive criticism. I have an earful for you, from the vantage point of a girl who has been typing manuscripts and associating with authors for nearly five years. I read many magazines and look over many more. After perusing your November issue, I have this to say:

Most of your stories are good, but the title of "Office Politics" is trite, "Temple of Ghosts" is too much like the Siamese story you printed last month, and "B for Billygoat" has a childish plot. Your grade of fiction I should classify as spotty. Are you really hard up for good material?

Your comics are poorly located and your poetry is crowded like poultry in an East Side market. In general I don't care much for the arrangement of pictures in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, but I do like your headline typography.

You ask for subjects for covers. Try something smart and semirisque. You are about two miles behind *Judge*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*.

*I dare you to print this letter.*

R. N.

We are glad you liked some of the contents in the November MUNSEY, Miss N., and we hope this December issue will please you.

New York.

I was rather impressed with the editorial in your November issue, asking readers for their opinions on covers. It at least shows that MUNSEY'S is interested not only in building up advertising circulation, but also wants to please its readers.

My personal preference for cover designs runs to the action type. The ultra-modern type of cover is seldom understood, and has been greatly overdone by the so-called high-brow magazines.

Girl pictures offer a pleasant variety, but the appeal of this type is bound to be limited.

G. P. W.

Harvey, Iowa.

Am inclosing one dollar, for which please send me, beginning with December number, five issues of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, as per your advertisement.

Now just a word about the stories: Read "Spotlight"—the last installment—missed the first. Never read a clearer synopsis; did not

feel that I had missed any of the story. Will say for Ellen Hogue and Jack Bechdolt, they know their stuff. Their conception of characters is *right*. None of the usual overdrawn delineations, and the "villain who pursued her" is conspicuously absent, for which praises be!

"Office Politics," by Edgar Franklin, is great. I can hardly wait for the rest of it.

Did the MUNSEY MAGAZINE publish "Uncle Tom's Mansion"? If so, what numbers, and can I obtain it? I read "Wildcat," and it was good.

E. H.

"Uncle Tom's Mansion," a long novelette of tent show life, by Ellen Hogue and Jack Bechdolt, was printed complete in MUNSEY'S for November, 1927. The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York City, supplies back copies of MUNSEY, *Argosy-Allstory* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*.

Cebu, Philippine Islands.

Sorry I can't find your name, Mr. Editor. The explanation, at that, is flattering. Even stray dogs select MUNSEY'S from our front porch to chew up! All the MUNSEYS we have here were good chewing for dogs, or else were left for us to chew on.

My husband grew tired of the same writers which have been appearing week after week, month after month, in some of the other magazines, possibly under contract for quantity production. Our few copies of MUNSEY'S out here in the Philippines, where one bucks up and thinks, have been enjoyable because of *new* writers and different ones.

I have written this as of possible interest to you. Now comes what interests us: Who is R. H. Watkins, author of "Love Nests Must Go"? Also S. P. Wright, author of "Two Trails North"? May I ask if those two stories were "contract" stories?

We are guilty, in this superficial movie age, of opening a volume of O. Henry, Elbert Hubbard, or even Shakespeare, now and then. That is to say, we enjoy good writers. But we've traveled a lot.

Mrs. D. F. N.

For nearly twoscore years MUNSEY'S has been considered a magazine of good taste; now even canines seem to recognize that fact.

Sewell Peaslee Wright would chuckle to learn how dogs take to his fiction, for Mr. Wright was born under the Dog Star. His idea of Valhalla is to drive a team of huskies through the North Canadian woods at twenty below zero and stop at an isolated fur-trading post of the Hudson Bay Com-

pany where the factor is usually named Macdonald.

Richard Howells Watkins has been conspicuously successful as a newspaper reporter, special writer on aviation, magazine editor, and fiction writer. Like yourself, he has traveled widely, but is now a resident of rural Connecticut where—as you in sunny Cebu will appreciate—he is fighting old King Winter with armsful of well-seasoned firewood.

Neither Mr. Wright nor Mr. Watkins work for MUNSEY'S under contract. Both are free-lances. All writers are in that classification on this magazine; we do not delude ourselves or deceive our readers with "big names" under contract to grind out copy, good, bad or indifferent.

New York City.

I want you to know what I think of the story, "The Greatest Football Player of All Time," in your November issue.

Mr. Trevor has done much more than write a picturesque biography of the greatest football player. He has written a most thrilling, romantic and vivid description of the history and development of football from the bruising days of the early nineties, with its revolving wedges, flying tackles and strong-arm tactics, up through the various developments, to the aerial stage of to-day, not only giving a most intimate and intensely interesting story of the development of football, but also a careful study of the personalities of all the great outstanding players who have distinguished themselves on the gridiron, both East and West.

It is beautifully written by a writer of authority, and is intensely entertaining and instructive, bringing back to us as it does, memories of all the great battles of the past right up to the present time.

It is a great contribution to the history of the game, and will be devoured by the throngs of students now attending our schools and colleges, and likewise by the old "grads" of the 90's, like myself.

H. T. G

Chicago, Ill.

You sure picked a winner when you printed George Trevor's remarks on "The Greatest Football Player of All Time." Boy! That was *some* thriller, you can quote me. As a rule, non-fiction doesn't get a rise out of yours truly, but I take off my Stetson to the shade of Frank A. Hinkey and the guy who wrote him up.

J. M.

We are rather proud of Mr. Trev-

or's article. The third of the series appears in this number. There are more to come.

Lincoln Park, N. J.

As I have no permanent address during the winter months, I cannot subscribe to magazines other than for short-time periods. I will not resubscribe to MUNSEY'S, as I am now able to buy your magazine locally. I have been reading MUNSEY'S regularly for more than thirty years, and the habit is too hard to break now, but will continue to buy single issues.

M. W. R.

There is a double advantage in subscribing, Miss R. (1) You get your copy regularly, and (2) you save on cost. But in your case the wisest course is to patronize the local news dealer.

Boston, Mass.

During the recent campaign the newspapers and magazines published I don't know how many square miles of stuff about the candidates, but the most human analysis of its kind I ran across was Edwin C. Hill's article in the November MUNSEY.

Mr. Hill seized upon the contrast in personalities almost with a flash of genius in writing of Governor Smith: "Crowds seem to take particular pleasure in calling him 'Al.' Nobody calls out 'Good boy, Herb!' when Mr. Hoover speaks. It would be out of place, an entirely false note."

F. B. McE.

Plymouth, Mich.

I wish to add my tribute to MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. Every issue contains more interesting stories of the kind I like to read than any other periodical I know of. MUNSEY'S has a wide variety of entertaining stories, covering almost every clime. I do not let a month go by without getting my copy. If I have a preference, it is for sea and Northland stories, but any story that has faith, spirit and action demands my interest.

I trust your special articles will not crowd out too much fiction.

W. H. D.

Croydon Park, Sydney, Australia.

The August number is much better. A good many of my friends like MUNSEY.

MRS. E. S.

Riverside, N. J.

In reply to your very interesting editorial, urging readers to state what types of front covers they prefer, I am writing to say that the action covers interest me most and pictures of nature in the different seasons.

Miss M. E. B.

New York.

I desire to vote for continuing your policy of illustrating the leading story on the front cover each month, with this exception: it is not necessary to confine your subject to the

serial story. One of the complete stories may very easily be the one best adapted for such purpose.

S. N.

Chicago, Ill.

I like best in the November issue: "Office Politics!" "The Little Finger of Fate," and "B for Billygoat."

E. B.

Just the thing for your studio or bedroom—a pen-and-ink drawing on heavy artboard, ten by fifteen inches, or fifteen by twenty—is presented *free* to the writer of each letter published in this department, until further notice. All you have to do is ask for it after seeing your letter in print.

The artboard subjects are the originals of illustrations which have appeared in recent issues of MUNSEY'S or the current issue. Select the one you want and state your second choice also.

We prefer letters of constructive criticism, but whether they're constructive or not, tell us what you think of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE—its stories, special articles, illustrations, front covers, editorials, poetry, advertisements. For example, how do you like the December issue?

## READER'S BALLOT

Ballot Editor,  
MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE,  
280 Broadway, New York City.

The stories I like best in your December issue are:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I do not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

# Looking Thru Munsey's

FOR JANUARY

## "THE WILDER GENERATION"

By JACK BECHDOLT

A swift-moving novelette of love and intrigue. An up-to-the-minute girl and her dancing mother speak for their respective eras. The parked car of to-day versus the buggy ride of the naughty naughts.

## GILBERT GABRIEL

*Noted American dramatic critic*

inaugurates for our readers a new department on the stage and its people. Mr. Gabriel knows his theatre in all its aspects, and he interprets for you the hidden meanings in that world of make-believe.

*The second installment of*

## "TIGER LOVE," Robert Terry Shannon's great novel.

The sensation seekers continue their dizzy pace amid the marble mazes of that luxurious jungle—New York.

*Short story lovers will find a particularly excellent selection.*

## JANUARY MUNSEY

On Sale at all news-stands Thursday, December 20th.